

# Prayer and Prayerfulness

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A prayerful attitude is different from an act of prayer. The attitude one has towards money, family, and other living organisms on this earth is something that grows upon one as one grows up in a culture, even without knowing the background behind it. It is not that we have a real understanding about money, for example, that leads us to have a certain attitude towards it. As you grow up in a culture with parents subscribing to certain values, there is a certain attitude that grows upon you with reference to various things. In the Indian culture, for example, if you step on a book unwittingly you ask for pardon. This is peculiar only to our religious culture. It is not that the person who does that necessarily understands the background behind that attitude. After all, why should you not step on a book, especially an Indian history book, which you really have no value for? It is because we have a certain attitude towards knowledge that does not allow you to do that without asking for pardon. We have a certain reverence towards land, home, sun, etc. Is it born of understanding? I would say yes, and no. There is some understanding. You offer a prayer to the land which you are going to till to grow a crop, or build a house on. It is born of a certain attitude. Here there is an act of prayer born of a certain attitude. What does that person understand? There is some understanding, I am sure, that it is not all in his hands. Since you can have certain assumptions which may be wrong, and because of which you can get into trouble, you have a prayerful attitude, and that keeps you safe. That attitude is manifest in the form of a simple action—a prayerful action. The attitude pervades your entire life—your thought life, and your life of activity. But it pervades in a very hazy manner when there is no understanding, or incomplete understanding, for you cannot have an attitude without understanding.

## Prayerful Attitude is Born of Understanding

Reverence to the world itself and the forces that govern it is born of a certain limited understanding. If I ask an Indian villager, “Where is God?” he will say, “Everything is *Bhagavān*; he is everywhere.” When he says this, does he understand it totally? He has some idea, some understanding, and this is what naturally grows upon you as you grow in a society that has such attitudes. The validity of the attitude or the staying capacity of the attitude is entirely dependent upon how much you understand the background behind it. The understanding of the background is what we learn from the sources that are supposed to educate us. Books like the

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*Gītā*, and so on are supposed to teach us the background behind the attitude that one picks up naturally.

A prayerful attitude towards life in general is the attitude of a person who understands certain realities. It is very clear that a human being is subject to limitations. The limitations are not in one area. Any which way you look at your life—in terms of resources, knowledge, power, and health—you see that you are limited and not limitless, the Lord. We have a great word for the Lord, a self-explanatory word—*Bhagavān*.

### **The Meaning of *Bhagavān***

*Bhagavān* really makes you understand what you are not. This Sanskrit word is like the word *balavān*. The word *bala* means strength; *vān* is *wāla* in Hindi, a possessive suffix. The one who has strength is *balavān* (*balam asya asti iti balavān*). We know *dhanavān* means one who has *dhanam*, wealth. One who has virtue, *guṇa*, is *guṇavān*. By the simple logic of extension, without knowing Sanskrit, we can say *Bhagavān* means one who has *bhaga*. Here the tradition comes into the picture. The meaning is arrived at by more than just language. There is also a certain meaning that is given by convention (*ruḍhi*). That is the meaning imputed to this word *bhaga*, in the word that comes down to us as *Bhagavān*.

You can't understand something new unless you have something similar from which you can expand your understanding. In your infrastructure of understanding, if you have certain elements akin to what you are trying to understand, then you can absorb the new piece of knowledge. If you don't have anything similar in the infrastructure, it is very difficult to understand. If you have put in enough effort and gathered enough information in a given discipline of knowledge, then a little more can be understood because in your infrastructure of understanding you have the necessary elements. Whether it is business, astrology, or astronomy you have to know the basic principles and terminology used in order to understand. This is the kind of situation we have in terms of knowing.

To understand *Bhagavān* you must have the experience of something similar to *Bhagavān*. *Bhaga* is over-lordship (*aiśvaryam – īśvarasya bhāva aiśvaryam*). The term over-lordship cannot be understood unless you have had the experience of being someone who has that over-lordship. Otherwise, the word will be flotsam in your mind—it won't sink in. A word is supposed to make the meaning transpire in the mind and disappear. When you don't understand, only the words remain in the mind. They don't disappear. Complete over-lordship is totally

unknown to me. Over-lordship of what? I am lorded over by everybody and by all the forces. I can't touch a live wire unless I want to get electrocuted. I have to obey the forces all the time. If I want to avoid unpleasant situations, I have to conform to the laws. I have no over-lordship so how can I understand over-lordship? This is why *Bhagavān* is not assimilated by us. The word God does not mean much to a person even when there is a feeling that there is a force etc., that is all-pervasive and so on. But the assimilation of over-lordship is possible if we have something in our own experience in terms of over-lordship.

Look at yourself. Your strength, your prowess, freedom and choices indicate that you have *aiśvaryam* when you relate to a small ant. When you see it drowning you can crush it or leave it to its fate. If the ant can pray, then you are the Lord according to it. You can help. The ant doesn't know who helped. It was an unknown hand. It was miracle. You have a satisfaction; you have over lordship. With reference to certain forms of life you are *Īśvara*. That sensitivity is important. Then you find yourself enjoying *aiśvaryam* with reference to certain things. You are at the giver's end. You are not the one who is benefited, but the benefactor; this is *aiśvaryam*. But when you are not in the drivers seat, not in control, then your over-lordship is gone. You don't have *aiśvaryam*. In your infrastructure of understanding, however, there is this experience (*anubhava*) of being a giver, a benefactor, with reference to a few things, like a little ant and so on. The experience of *aiśvaryam* and also helplessness is there for a human being. Suppose that particular disposition, that *bhāvanā*, of being a benefactor, is uninhibited and extended to every being. That *aiśvaryam* that is experienced is *bhaga*—limitless *aiśvaryam*. The one who has uninhibited *aiśvaryam* is *Bhagavān*.

Now look at your self with reference to an animal. It can't read. You can because you have knowledge (*jñānam*). In terms of knowledge you are able to give. But still, there are questions that pose problems. For instance, why is the flower red? You have to say, "I don't know." All our knowledge is inhibited, limited by "I don't know." Suppose there is knowledge without any such thing, as 'I don't know', then it is complete knowledge. This is *Bhagavān*—limitless over-lordship and limitless knowledge.

Limitless wealth, *śrī*. Everybody has money, even a person who lives by begging. However rich a person is, he is always wanting more. He has money, but not money to give—a limitation. Everyone has a limit. There is no question of wealth (*śrī*) being total. Suppose what you have as yours includes everybody else's; that is total wealth (*samagra-śrī*). Limitless *śrī*—the wealth that you have is included in whose wealth. Even though you think that it is your

wealth, if that is also included in the wealth we are referring to here, then it is limitless *śrī*. The experience of being one who has wealth (*dhanavān*) is known to you when you are in the giver's position. Here we are talking about uninhibited giving. We are all at the receiving end; everyone depends on someone else for something or the other. The one whose wealth is infinite, who is always at the giver's end is the real *dhanavān*. This is *Bhagavān*.

*Vīryam*, strength. You have that experience (*anubhava*) also. You can create, destroy and sustain, but in a limited way. One whose *vīryam*, or capacity (*sāmarthyam*) is limitless is *Bhagavān*. He is the one who has absolute strength, *balavān*.

You have certain glories, but the one who has all glories, including your glories too, is the one who has real glory, *yaśas*.

You have a degree of freedom towards certain things—balloons, tops, marbles—you are not interested in them at all now. You neither hate them nor want them. But as a child they were very important. Now, having grown up, you have *vairāgya* towards them. There is a fullness (*pūrṇatvam*) with reference to them. The freedom that you experience when you relate to things like this is total and uninhibited. This is the freedom, the *vairāgya*, of *Bhagavān* with reference to all things. The one who has total *vairāgya* is *Bhagavān*.

All these are called *bhaga*—total overlordship (*aiśvarya*), all knowledge (*jñāna*), infinite wealth (*śrī*), absolute capacity (*vīrya*), all glory (*yaśas*), complete dispassion (*vairāgya*). The one who has *bhaga* is *Bhagavān*.

### **Window to Understanding *Bhagavān* and Acknowledging Helplessness**

While understanding *Bhagavān* we understand our limitation in terms of wealth, knowledge, strength, power, objectivity (*vairāgya*). In spite of limitations, if the limited person experiences freedom with reference to certain things, he is enjoying the condition of *Īśvara*—relatively. The one who has all this absolutely is *Bhagavān*. He is *Īśvara*. Therefore, helplessness is natural to a human being. When there is helplessness we need a certain attitude. If the attitude is not there, we are going to feel helpless all the time.

Our appreciation of *Īśvara* becomes clear when we understand *Īśvara* as *Bhagavān*. The word *Bhagavān* reveals the nature of *Īśvara* to us. I see myself in a certain way as one having limitations in terms of wealth, power etc. I also see myself as having a certain freedom when I relate to things that are absolutely at my mercy. Then I am different. And that is the window for

us to see what *Īśvara* could be. That uninhibited *aiśvarya*, fullness, freedom from longing etc., that we experience occasionally gives us an insight into what is *Īśvara*. We understand *Īśvara* intimately as one who is limitless in terms of all these attributes (*guṇas*), these auspicious attributes (*kalyāṇaguṇa*). Thus, *Īśvara* is the one who is endowed with all these auspicious attributes (*kalyāṇaguṇa-sampanaḥ īśvaraḥ*). Infinite auspicious attributes are there, and I am fraught with limitation. This brings about a certain helplessness on my part.

Whether or not I understand it, the fact that I am helpless is very clear, because I cannot even predict what I am going to think next. What will be my next thought? Since I cannot even do this, I do not have the future in my control. Death is always around the corner. Disease is always there. It can overpower me. The forces that I have to deal with are more powerful than the power that I can command. There is always helplessness. I try to manipulate the world as much as I can, but the world also manipulates me, because I form the world for others. I try to change people and they try to change me. Every individual feels this helplessness. Either I am stuck with this helplessness or I deal with it. This is where I have to make use of my knowledge of *Īśvara*.

### **Understanding *Īśvara***

*Īśvara* is the cause for what is here— this entire world (*sarvam jagat*), known and unknown to me. When you say ‘entire’ (*sarvam*), you are referring to what you know plus what you don’t know. Otherwise, *sarvam* has no meaning. I know something about this world. In addition, there are a lot of things that exist that I do not know. Together they are *sarvam*. This entire *jagat* including my body, mind, sense complex is not away from *Īśvara*. In other words, *Īśvara*, a conscious being recognized as all-knowing, all-powerful as *Bhagavān*, is not only the maker, but also the material cause for this *jagat*. This is not generally understood well. We gloss over this. The material cause is a very important factor in understanding the nature of *Īśvara*. The *jagat* is born of *Īśvara*. If *Īśvara* doesn’t require to borrow any material to make this world, then from a standpoint *Īśvara* is also the material cause.

It is like your own dream. In the dream, you are the maker of the dream world, and you are also the material cause for the dream manifestation. Therefore, we only use the word creation in the sense of the knowledge that is involved, the vision that is involved. In that sense we can say the *jagat* is a creation. But from the standpoint of the material cause, the *jagat* is a manifestation of *Īśvara*. In the dream you are the maker of the dream world. You are a knowledgeable person endowed with the capacity (*śakti*) to make that dream world. And being not separate from the

material that is necessary for the dream world, you pervade the entire dream world. The dream space is you, because the effect is always sustained by the material. Your shirt, for instance, is sustained by the fabric; it cannot be independent of the fabric. You cannot even imagine a shirt minus some fabric. That is an astounding fact. This is true with reference to any one thing. You can't think of a building without thinking of the materials that have gone into it. When you see this kind of a situation, one thing becomes clear—no object can be independent of the material of which it is made. Even though the object is named differently from the material—shirt and cotton—spelled differently, and understood differently, at the same time, the two objects referred to by two different words really refer to one substance alone. That is cotton. We can go further and say that the cotton is but fibers, the fibers are molecules, molecules are atoms, atoms are particles and so on. Everything is sustained by something else. At the particle level it becomes a concept.

Therefore we see that the effect is not separate from its material cause. In understanding *Īśvara* we use the dream experience to help us assimilate the fact that *Īśvara* is not separate from all there is. In the dream, the world is sustained by me; I am the cause for the dream world, dream space, dream time, and so on. I pervade every one of them. It is only because I am the material cause that I can pervade the dream world, otherwise, I'll be like the pot maker who is elsewhere. When you buy a pot and bring it home, the pot maker does not come with you, because he has not made the pot out of himself. The material is separate from him. When you bring the pot you can't leave the material, whereas you can leave the maker behind. Between the maker and material there is a separation.

When we are talking of the total, however, there is no separation. The material cause being yourself in the dream, you pervade the whole world there. Space, time, stars etc., have come out of you. If that is understood, then *Īśvara* can be understood as the one who is manifest here in the form of space, time and everything that is empirically experienced by you. This empirical reality means that this is a chair, this is a microphone etc., for all of us. There is a certain reality about all of them. This entire *jagat* which is empirically real, is a manifestation of *Īśvara* who is *Bhagavān*. In this manifestation, I as an individual have an identity, a confinement, in which I do not extend beyond the extremity of my anatomy. Up to this skin alone I go. Beyond that is the world. If *Īśvara* pervades everything, then he pervades my body, mind, sense complex also. Then how do I have an individuality?

## **Understanding Our Place in the Scheme**

To understand your position in the scheme of things is very crucial. It is like that of a tree standing in a forest. The tree is an individual (*vyāṣṭi*) and the forest is the total (*samaṣṭi*). Even though the forest includes the tree, the tree is an entity. It has a life and death, a certain uniqueness in time and place. It has its own particular existence with its own features. An oak is different from a tamarind tree. Even between two mango trees, one mango tree occupies place P, the other one occupies P1. There are differences in everything. While the forest is all-pervasive, and includes all the trees, each tree has its own individuality. This individual-total (*vyāṣṭi-samaṣṭi*) relationship is very crucial in discovering in myself an attitude that is proper, that is in keeping with what is there. Between a tree and another tree there can be a relationship. There can be a mother tree, a daughter tree and so on. But with all the relationships, there is one forest to which you also relate. The tree relates to the forest. That relating is impossible if the tree does not recognize the existence of a forest that includes the tree. If the tree were to think that the forest is something that is up in the sky, the relationship would be wrong.

You can see how critical it is to understand that the pervasiveness of *Īśvara*, like the pervasiveness of the forest, includes me. I have my own identity, an identity that is confined to this physical body. Similarly, each one has a certain individuality. Enlightenment has nothing to do with it. It is something more, something different. Enlightenment does not in any way eliminate this individuality. The person is an enlightened individual. This position of the individual relating to the total gives rise to a certain further understanding.

## **The Basic Relationship of the Basic Person**

As an individual you are related to other people in the society. Relating is not avoidable. You have to relate. You are born related, even though at birth you can't yet recognize the relationship. You live related too. You make your life related, and unrelated, nobody lives. Suppose you become a *sādhu*. Even though you may not have any connections, the fact remains that there are relationships. When you look at something you become related—you are the subject and what you look at becomes the object. When I relate, naturally I am present in every form of relationship, whether it be with parents, siblings, or community, etc. But there is a difference. The father's son is different from the mother's son. The relationship is different. The tree standing in the forest is related to all the other trees differently. Then what am I? I am all this and more.

It is clear that I am a single individual, a conscious being, confined to this body, mind, sense complex. This individual is a basic person. That basic person fills up the daughter, son, wife, husband, sister, brother. In other words that basic person assumes a status relevant to the other related person. Confusion comes when I don't relate relevantly to people. If with your daughter you act as if you are her daughter, there is a confused self-identity. Related to certain people, I don't bring out of myself the relevant person. The relevant person has to be brought out when one brings oneself to bear upon another person in terms of relationship.

I am the same person, the conscious person confined to this body, mind, and sense complex. That entity is related—to my father as son, to my son as father. My presence as father is not always there; it only emerges when I relate to my son. The status of son is totally replaced by the opposite, father. The status of father is totally replaced by the opposite, son. This kind of replacement is total and complete. Let it be complete. There should be no hangover. When you have an argument with someone, that should not be carried over when you interact with another person. If the person with whom you argued totally disappears and is replaced by the relevant person then you are a sane person.

Even though these are variable roles that I play in my day-to-day life, the one who is invariably present is me, the basic individual. To whom is that basic individual related? The invariably present individual who assumes different roles is also related because he is an individual. An individual is always related to the total, while he is not always related to other individuals comprising the total. Relationship with other individuals is relative. The total is the one who pervades my father, mother, everybody that is here, plus my own body, mind, sense complex. To that *Īśvara*, like the tree relating to the forest basically, I as an individual relate basically.

When I think of my father I am a son; when I think of my son I am a father, when I think of God what am I? Let me call myself a devotee. Then when I think of my father, God is replaced. That means that in the world of people, God becomes another entity, one more invisible person. We call God a being and then reduce that God to something invisible. This is a problem. Devotion seems to be some kind of a spell that comes and goes. This problem is due to not understanding *Īśvara* properly. How can you have a clear attitude, an attitude that is permanent unless you appreciate the individual-total (*vyaṣṭi*, *samaṣṭi*) relationship? In fact, the individual remains related, like the tree that remains related to the forest as long as it exists. If I, as an individual, recognize the fact that *Īśvara* pervades the total which includes my body, mind, sense



complex, everything being a manifestation of *Īśvara*, then as an individual I remain related to the Lord. When I remain related to the Lord then I am a devotee. In effect, it helps me maintain a healthy and objective attitude. This attitude is born of further understanding.

If the *jagat* is a manifestation of *Īśvara*, my understanding of *Īśvara* is further strengthened, when I appreciate *Īśvara* in the form of the various orders that we see. The physical universe, etc., is the Lord's knowledge manifest in the form of the *jagat*. If that is so, the physical order in the physical universe is a manifestation of *Īśvara*. I look at the physical world as physical order, an order which pervades my physical body.

Basically, as an individual, I am related to *Īśvara*. This relationship is between the individual and the total. One important thing to note about *Īśvara* is that while there are many manifest forms, like the sun and so on, there are also within this manifest universe, possibilities of further manifestations. Every software before its invention was a possible manifestation. Thus we have a number of means and ends. The end is a possibility, and the means is something we employ to tap, to collapse, the possibility.

### **Understanding the Basic Person Gives Freedom**

The awareness that the basic person is a devotee brings about a certain attitude. It gives me a certain space while I play different roles in my life. The awareness of my being not basically son or daughter, father or mother, is the space. An actor playing a role on the stage has space while playing the role. It is not that only before playing the role and after playing the role he is aware of who he is. Even while playing the role the actor knows. "I am not the role." That I am not the role is the space I am talking about, the space for the person to be free. The role and the person are one, no doubt, but while the role is the person, the person the person is not the role. There is a devotee father, a devotee mother. If mother is the role I play, or father is the role I play, the one who plays the role is the devotee. Every role implies challenges, but with this understanding, the challenges are confined to the role. They do not filter through to affect the person. The distance between the person and the role is not physical; the role is the person. But the person, being aware of his self-identity, enjoys freedom from the problems of the role. The role's problems belong to the role alone. A rich actor can willingly assume the role of a beggar. The problems of being a person living on begging do not travel to affect the rich actor. He knows he is going to be richer by being a beggar for some time. That is the awareness. This awareness of self-identity is the freedom.

Look at the freedom one has in the simple awareness of a reality, the awareness of the self being free, free from the role. I am already free from the role, while the role is not independent of me. I am not presenting two different entities here. There is a person who plays a role. When the role is played the role is the person, but the person is not the role. This is a very rewarding fact. The recognition of this fact gives me the freedom to play any role that I am called upon to. My recognition that I am basically related to the Lord as an individual is what I call *bhakti*. That gives me a certain attitude, an attitude which gives me not only freedom while playing the role, but also a trust in the total. *Īśvara* is in the form or order, and therefore, I can trust the order. When I trust the order, the order cannot victimize me.

### **Infallibility is *Īśvara***

The problem of the human being is ‘why me?’ When someone is bereaved, there is often a feeling ‘why me?’ There is a sense of persecution. It looks as though I am specially singled out to become to be a recipient of this unpleasant situation. Really speaking, this ‘why me’ idea cannot exist in the same place where there is this trust in *Īśvara* in the form of order. Taking *Īśvara* to be infallible without proper understanding will lead to all kinds of problems. First you think that *Īśvara* is infallible and conclude that all your prayers will be answered. But then, they are not answered or the opposite has happened, so you say that you don’t believe in *Īśvara*, not understanding what *Īśvara* is. *Īśvara* cannot fail. I should appreciate *Īśvara* as the one who is in the form of order. What is order cannot fail. What is confusion, chaotic, random cannot give you an answer. You can’t put a step forward. Order means there is predictability, assurance. Since my knowledge is not complete, I cannot be sure that everything will happen as I want. That is the reason why a prayerful attitude helps.

When you undertake an action with a certain result in mind, you assume that if everything goes well, it will happen. You can plan and work for it, but it may or may not happen. If *Īśvara* is understood as the one who is in the form of various orders, that cannot fail. What cannot fail is order. Being in the form of order is infallibility, that is, not failing is the nature of *Īśvara*. But then, how come my prayer is not answered? That is because there are a number of factors that we do not know about. Your own past action may be influencing what is happening right now. Otherwise, why is there the word ‘luck’? Luck is the human experience. When you say that you are lucky, you have the awareness that things could have gone differently. What should be the proper attitude when things don’t go well? Because I have trust in the infallibility of *Īśvara*, and trust in the means and ends, it gives me self-confidence. Otherwise, I will be a failure

many times over. There is no such thing as failure. There is only wrong expectation, some unforeseen obstacles. You expect some legitimate results after working hard. That result may or may not happen. If it doesn't happen, I can say that *Īśvara* has failed, or I can say that my expectation was wrong. I did not know about the hidden variables. My own karma may be working against me. *Puṇya* and *pāpa* get unfolded every day, indicating a certain force over which I have no control at all.

To be successful in a given undertaking you have to be at the right place at the right time. Nobody knows the right time and right place. A car on the road is at the right place, but it meets with an accident because it is there at the wrong time. That is the time the other car also wanted to occupy the same place. If only one knows what is the right place and right time, everybody will be successful. You can accomplish whatever you want. This being the situation, the infallibility of *Īśvara* is understood because it is in the form of order. It is given to me only to act (*karmaṇyeva adhikāraḥ*); these words of the *Gītā* become very real. I only have choice over my action, and whatever I do is done in good faith. When the result comes, I must have an attitude, a prayerful attitude, so that whatever comes, it is not a failure. The results that come are sometimes inhibited by my past *karma*. When we find things do not really happen as we want, we understand the infallibility of the laws, the law of *karma* included. Even though I cannot prove that this is the law of karma, from the effect we arrive at the cause. From our experience of situations, the unasked for, unexpected, sudden turn because of which everything is different, either in our favor or against us, we recognize the law of karma. In other words, when we recognize the limitation of our knowledge and resources, we can only be prayerful in our attitude and relax. We relax in the awareness of the infallibility of *Īśvara*. That comes from trust in the infallibility of *Īśvara*. Then you realize that you are not victimized and that there is a common law which is the order. The more you understand that, the less is the feeling of persecution. This is the attitude of a devotee which is always there while playing different roles.

Since there is a sense of helplessness, we have prayer. Prayerfulness is an attitude born of trust in the infallibility of *Īśvara* which gives us a readiness to accept what comes. This is called *prasāda-buddhi*, an attitude of accepting what comes gracefully without much lamenting. There may be causes I don't understand, but *Īśvara*'s infallibility is very clear to me. Therefore, I can accept it gracefully.

## Tapping the Potential – Earning Grace

One important thing to note about *Īśvara* is that while there are many manifest forms, like the sun and so on, there are also within this manifest universe, possibilities of further manifestations. Every software before its invention was a possible manifestation. Thus we have a number of means and ends. The end is a possibility, and the means is something we employ to tap, to collapse, the possibility, to surface the given end. An end is a possibility if it is something that is to be produced (*utpādyam*) and you have the means to produce it. You sow the seeds and raise the crop. You can create a new machine. Or, it is already there and you want to reach it (*āpya*) by a given means. There are means and ends like this, and there are many hidden variables in both. How am I going to control them? You can control them, or attempt to make sure that things go well through prayer, which is a karma that taps the potentials. *Īśvara* is already manifest in the form of the *jagat* and all its forces. In that manifest form there are a lot of possibilities and one of them is grace. How do you earn this grace? Does *Bhagavān* choose the recipient? Grace is the result of karma. Whatever you received in the past and what you have now was earned by you. There is no free grace.

What earns grace? Two things. The *śāstra* says there are karmas called *iṣṭa* and *pūrta*. Any form of prayer is *iṣṭa*. It is a means to tap grace. Whether it is a Vedic ritual or daily *pūjā* it is *iṣṭa-karma*. Anything that you do to help another is *pūrta-karma*. These are the two means by which you tap grace.

### Giving - *pūrta-karma*

In our *śāstra* we have been told that *pūrta-karma* is a very important means to gather *punya*. *Pūrtam* means a fulfilling *karma*, one in which you fulfill a need. It is for the common good that you do something. Digging wells, building rest houses along the way for travelers, are examples of *pūrta-karma*. And it should be done with a certain attitude. One should give without a motive (*śraddhayā deyam*); don't give with pride (*aśraddhyā adeyam*); give with the all the wealth that you have (*śriyā deyam*); give with humility (*hriyā deyam*); give with fear of whether the person will accept it or not (*bhiyā deyam*); give with understanding (*samvidā deyam*). The most important is *śraddhā*. There is no other motive than wishing that what I give will do good to the person to whom I give. It may be a single person who needs help. Make sure the person deserves help. Then give a little more than you can, with no strings attached. That is called *tyāga*. The Bhagavad Gītā says that the giving that is done just because it is to be given is the real giving (*dātavyam iti yat dānam tat sātvikam ucate*). Giving, *dānam*, should be without

any strings attached; it is a thing to be done by me because I happen to have it. When you realize that you are both a giver and receiver it makes you understand yourself as a person and earns *punya*.

I can only be thankful. There is no reason to be proud unless one is ignorant. Everything is given to me. Realizing that I am also at the receiving end, that I am at the mercy of so many people and forces, I try to give more than I receive. That is an intelligent way of living. By *pūrta-karma* there is an immediate result of the satisfaction that you did the right thing. You are acting in keeping with *dharma*. Reaching out is the best form of *dharma* and it produces *punya*. You earn the grace that makes the difference between success and failure. According to the *śāstra* this is how you grow into a person who is mature, adequate, and self-sufficient. Just being what one is, not because of what one has. I am adequate because of what I am, not because of what I happen to possess. That kind of adequacy you can grow into by *pūrtakarma*.

### **Prayer - *iṣṭa-karma***

Prayer, the *iṣṭa-karma* is of three types, divided on the basis of the means used (*karaṇam*) to perform the prayer. An individual is endowed with a physical body. When you do something physically your expression is complete. In fact, the person who is identified with the physical body is called in the *Vedānta-śāstra* a *viśva*, a complete person. When you employ the physical limbs in offering your prayer, that *karma* is called *kāyikam-karma*. *Kāya* is the physical body, and a *kāyikam-karma* is a karma connected to the physical body. A Vedic ritual like *sandhyā-vandanam* or *agni-hotram*, a *pūjā*, and pilgrimages are all *kāyikam karma*. An altar is involved. You invoke the Lord in a particular form, and you offer a prayer of worship. This is the most potent means for gaining the unseen result (*adr̥ṣṭa*) of *punya*. *Kāyikam-karma* employs the physical limbs, materials, speech and, of course, the mind. *Kāya*, the physical body, *vāk*, the organ of speech, and *manah*, the mind are the three means by which we express ourselves, and they are all employed in a ritualistic form of prayer. Naturally, in the production of *adr̥ṣṭa* in the form of grace (*anugraha*,) or *punya* there is nothing equivalent to this form of prayer.

The whole expression of *Īśvara* is in forms. Nobody really worships an image. When you worship a form don't you recognize the form? If it is made of stone, do you see the stone or not? When you see the stone and then worship, do you worship the stone? In fact you worship *Īśvara*. When the whole thing is a manifestation of *Īśvara*, we can have natural phenomena as altars for worship. The sun, air, stars, planets, water and so on are objects of worship. Any aspect is good

enough to invoke the total. If I want to draw your attention, I touch your hand and you respond. If I touch your little finger how much attention should you pay to me? A little attention? When the little finger is touched you are touched. The little finger is pervaded by me totally. If I want to touch the ocean, I only need to touch the nearest wave. So too, any natural phenomenon can be an altar for me to invoke the total. Or the total can also be worshipped in a given manifestation, as a given *devatā*. When every form is a manifestation of *Īśvara*, any form is good enough to invoke the total. Or I can invoke the Lord in a given aspect for a given purpose. That is why our rituals are highly sophisticated. For every problem there is a ritual. There is a broad-spectrum prayer and a specific one. When I worship the altar, I worship the Lord, not the altar. Traditionally given names and forms like Rāma, Kṛṣṇa etc., are also the Lord. This is one level. But when I ask you to think of God and you think of Rāma, that means Rāma is your *iṣṭa-devatā*. A physical expression of prayer is the most potent and it implies sacrifice. All *abhiṣeka* etc. have this principal of sacrifice.

In this *kāyikam-karma*, as in any prayer, your free will is totally free. That is why prayer stands first as a means for gathering *puṇya*. You are never pressured to pray. You need not pray. It comes of your total volition. That is the karma that can produce a result. Karma means there will be a result; that karma has to come from free will. It is not a reaction, but total action. This is one way of gathering *puṇya*.

Another is *vācīkam karma* in which the mind and the organ of speech are involved. This is oral prayer. Reciting verses and chanting the names of the Lord invoking grace, you pray. Then there are *smārta* prayers from the *purāṇas* and *itihāsas* like the *Viṣṇu-sahasranāma* from the *Mahābhārata*, etc. It is oral, but can be converted to a ritual by offering a flower at the altar for every name. In producing *adr̥ṣṭa*, an oral prayer is less efficacious than a ritualistic prayer. A third form of oral prayer is *kīrtan*, etc. It has certain immediate (*dr̥ṣṭa*) results. In group prayer, there is a group psychology in which one influences the other to produce certain immediate benefits (*dr̥ṣṭa phala*). Immediately, there can be certain sense of relief, etc. besides that, something special is gained when reciting a meaningful prayer.

When the oral prayer is done mentally it becomes *dhyānam*. Prayer, in general, can be defined as an activity in which the Lord is involved in one form or the other, *saguṇa-brahma-viṣaya-vyāpāra*. It can be physical activity (*kāyika-vyāpāra*), like *pūjā*, or oral activity (*vāk-vyāpāra*) like *pārāyaṇam*. When it is done mentally it is *dhyānam*. If the Lord is involved and you do it mentally, then alone is it meditation (*saguṇa-brahma viṣaya-mānasa-vyāpāra*). It has

an immediate result (*dr̥ṣṭa-phala*) but the unseen result (*adr̥ṣṭa phala*) is less than for an oral or ritual prayer. That is why all three are important. By doing them I gather the grace I need to control the hidden variables. My prayerful attitude plus prayer helps me.

Both *iṣṭa* and *pūrta-karma* earn grace for us, and also, in the process we grow. The attitude is always prayerful. Thus, we pray, and in life we become prayerful.