

Prayer and Prayerful Life

Swami Dayananda Saraswati
(2004 Anniversary Address)

As a human being I need to live intelligently. There is no choice. Endowed with choice every human being has no choice in exercising choice. And to exercise choice intelligently, one needs to follow a certain matrix of norms. Recognizing and choosing these norms stems from a certain maturity, and that maturity one needs to have to conduct one's life intelligently. One can't afford to mature later; one has to be mature. The most significant mark of maturity is the degree of objectivity one has towards oneself, towards the world and towards one's own ambitions for varieties of things.

One needs to be objective. One swami was talking about the sentence *artham anartham bhāvaya nityam*, which he translated as, always (*nityam*) consider, think of (*bhāvaya*), wealth or money (*artham*) as fraught with afflictions, sorrows and disappointments (*anartham*). One of the listeners was inspired and was ready to give up his wealth (*artha*). He wanted to know, "Where will I give this wealth?" The Swami said with a big smile, "Give it to me!" That's not Indian. We never say that a *sannyāsī* is wedded to poverty; he is wedded to the Lord of Lakṣmi, Lakṣmīpathi, Nārāyaṇa. That [aversion to wealth] is a different type of thinking, which has nothing to do with us. We don't look upon money as something secular. [Nor is] there is a spiritual pursuit and a secular pursuit. These kinds of divisions come from immature thinking. In our vision, there is nothing secular.

If you understand what God, Īśvara, is, then one thing becomes very clear. Īśvara is not another person who can, for instance, have his own email address god@heaven.org. The people who propose such a God are the people who think that God is formless and he needs a location. When you don't think, you can propose a lot of things. To think that God is formless, and that formless God needs a location, you must be a very special person. According to me, a

special person is one who needs a specialist. And more than this, they are very sure that this formless God is male. It is very funny.

If you look at the whole situation, you find that everything is unlike you. You are the only one like yourself. I am not talking about your fingerprints. I am not talking about the print of your DNA. I am talking of you as a consciousness being, the subject and the cognitive person who is the central figure in the scheme of things that you objectify. Time is unlike you because it is an object of your consciousness. Space is unlike you; it too is an object of your consciousness. In time and space anything you encounter is an object of consciousness. All those who are near and dear are objects of your consciousness; the objects of your dislike and hatred, all of them, with no exception, are objects of your consciousness. You are the only subject who is referred to by the pronoun 'I'.

If you consider the pronoun 'he', there are any number of people who can be referred to by 'he'. Even your dog is referred to by the word 'he'. The pronoun 'she' can be used to refer any female. Even the cyclone that was severe in the Bahamas and toned down in Florida is a 'she', because the previous one was a 'he'. There are any number of people and things whom you can refer to by the pronoun 'she'. There are also many objects which you can refer to by the neuter pronoun 'it'.

By the second person pronoun 'you', you can refer to the entire humanity. When you address each one as 'you', you can use the word 'you' to refer to any person. But you cannot use the word 'I' anywhere else. The word 'I' is also a pronoun, the first person singular pronoun, but it can refer only to yourself. That is true because there is only one subject, 'I'. The object is something that you objectify, that is, it has to be obliged, as an object, by a subject. Unless you see me, I am not here [for you]. Unless you recognize me, objectify me, I am not here. Even when I am talking I see some people laughing, some people not laughing and those who are not laughing nudging the next person asking, "What did he say?" It's not that they suddenly became deaf. But for all practical

purposes, some of these people were deaf because their minds were elsewhere. One needs to be there. I cannot reveal myself to you unless you oblige me. You need to hear me, you need to see me, otherwise I can't reveal my existence to you. The good thing is that the truth is the same with reference to you. I need to oblige you in order for your existence to be revealed to me. That really proves one point. Out of mind is out of sight. Out of sight can be within one's mind, but out of mind is always out of sight.

If God is someone who can be objectified, having his own address in a given place, then he becomes an object. He is, therefore one of the many objects in your life. Just as your brother is in California, your sister is in New York your parents are in India and your uncle is in Texas, God is in heaven. You can understand now how foolish it is to think that God is an object. If God is not an object, you, the subject, become God. That would mean that God is 5'7", your height. You have your own limitations in terms of knowledge and so many things. Any which way you look at yourself you find yourself wanting. Money-wise always wanting, influence-wise wanting, longevity-wise wanting, in other words time-wise wanting; spatially you are here and not elsewhere, wanting, memory-wise wanting. When you are wanting in every way, then emotionally you are not going to be adequate. That I am wanting conditions my emotions, so emotionally I am bound to be wanting. This cannot be God. Maybe God has got to be both object and subject. To be object and subject, God, Īśvara, should transcend both, should include both. There should be nothing outside Īśvara, nothing besides Īśvara, no equal to Īśvara. While Īśvara transcends everything, nothing transcends Īśvara. This is the truth and is something to be understood.

It is different from the claim that somebody loves you, which is a belief. It cannot be understood. Many a good relationship is broken because the other person's heart is not read by you. How are you going to understand somebody's love for you? You believe this person loves you. You see it in the eyes. But some people know how to make the eyes glitter as though there is love. That someone

loves you is a belief, but that you love is real. If you have reason to believe that you are loved by somebody, even though it is a belief, you had better believe it. It is healthy to believe that. We don't call it belief; we call it trust.

Such an important thing like love is to be trusted, but for us, God is not something to be believed. God is to be understood, and every thing else is to be believed, really. If you really understand physics, chemistry or any subject matter, everything is pending understanding, pending further understanding and pending further data. We just accept it for the time being. It works, and therefore we accept it. Newton was right until Einstein came along. Even his theory was questioned by people who were doing research in quantum mechanics. Therefore, please understand that everything else is a belief. Only God can be understood, because all that is here is God.

I have a lot more to say about this, but confining myself to the topic announced I'd like to tell you that to be objective is to understand that all that is here is Īśvara. And to be mature is to be objective. In the scheme of things I find myself an individual, an individual with certain limitations. Each individual has his or her limitations and a person without limitations becomes what we call Īśvara. If everything is Īśvara then Īśvara becomes limitless in knowledge. In other words, he is uninhibited in knowledge. He is uninhibited in *śakti*, power, uninhibited by time, uninhibited in pervasiveness. This makes the Lord *Bhagavān*. This is the meaning of *bhagavān*. *Balavān* is one who has *bala*, strength; *guṇavān* is one who has *guṇa*, virtues; *dhanavān* is one who has *dhana*, wealth; and *bhagavān* is one who has *bhaga*. What is *bhaga*? These are the *bhagas*—limitless knowledge, limitless over-lordship, limitless strength, limitless capacity, limitless glory and limitless objectivity. Every glory is Īśvara's glory. This is all in our culture. If you praise somebody he will say 'This is all *bhagavān ka ha'*. This is very common because people in general understand this. Īśvara can be taught, can be taught like mathematics. It is an equation. All that is here is Īśvara is an equation, *mahā*-equation. But that is not our topic here.

When I look at myself as an individual, I am limited and therefore, I have desires, ambitions one can say. One has ambitions. There is nothing wrong in having desires. Some people maintain that you should not have desires, because if you do, you will have disappointments. This is very simplistic. It is like suggesting that you treat a headache by removing your head. As long as you have a head, you will have headaches. Thinking that you have to remove desires is just wrong. That you have desires is a privilege. Don't think that I am being condescending or compromising. I am not. I mean this. A cow cannot have desires. Even an American cow cannot say to the bullock, "Honey shall we eat out today in a Chinese restaurant?" It can't have a desire like that. It is programmed and will behave instinctively. Therefore desiring is a privilege. You can only say that you don't know how to manage your desires. You can say that. Then, you have to learn how to manage them, but you can't say "I don't know how to manage my desires, so I want to remove them." You cannot remove your desires. Do you know why? Because you didn't decide to have them.

Nobody desires to have a desire. They enter into us whether we like it or not. As you go along, you pick up desires, and you don't have a say over this. You can only say, "I want to fulfill these desires." That's your choice. Desires themselves do not make a difference in your life or in anybody's life. What matters is whether you go along with the desire and decide to fulfill it. Then you employ the means of fulfillment. If it is pursuit of knowledge, there is a method of fulfilling that desire for knowledge. If it is a desire for an academic degree, there is a means of fulfilling it. Whatever be the desire, there is an appropriate means to fulfill it. It is a privilege; therefore, let us understand what is intelligent living.

That I have desires is a fact and a privilege. It is a privilege to have a capacity to desire. That I have ambitions proves that I am healthy. I want to fulfill them and these are my plans. I doubt, however, that these plans are adequate. Consult most of the New Jersey people who are doing consulting. That means they have no job. You need

to consult somebody who is supposed to know, who is supposed to be an expert. Consult that person and have a thorough plan. You shouldn't dart out into the darkness; you have to do your homework. That is an important thing. Now suppose you've done your homework and do what is to be done. You have made a flowchart and proceed step by step. Yet, at every step you must know that there are hidden variables, because when one is not all-knowing the hidden variables are inevitable.

There are hidden variables all the way. That is why some people have professions in re-engineering—it is because of too many hidden variables. Re-engineering involves finding out new hidden variables. The old pitfalls are gone, but there are new pitfalls and you are never going to figure out all the pitfalls that are going to be there. That's okay. It is part of the game. If everything is known to you, then life will be a bore. If there is no way of knowing anything then it is not possible to live. You have some knowledge, a certain capacity to foresee, and you do what you can do. To be intelligent is to expect the hidden variables and to control them. My God, I am not even able to control the known variables, where is the question of controlling hidden variables? That is the reason you need to be pragmatic.

To be pragmatic is to acknowledge that there are hidden variables and that I can't call all the shots. Even Tendulkar loses the middle stump. It is all a game of averages, like baseball. You look, and the other fellow has the ball. If at all you connect, it goes foul. The entire life is playing a game of averages. Therefore you need to control the hidden variables to some extent at least, so that you don't feel helpless. You help yourself because one can't afford to feel helpless. That paralyzes you. Therefore you help yourself with prayer.

Understand what is prayer. We always pray even before we begin something. After the conclusion of a task we offer a prayer of gratitude that we could conclude. Before undertaking a task, we offer a prayer so that it is completed. Whether you write a book or

you build a house there is an opening prayer for successful completion. Before building a house there is a ground-breaking ceremony. When you write a book, you first write a verse of prayer, and then only do you proceed. There is, in our tradition, this particular mandate that you are not supposed to read a book if it does not begin with a prayer. There are some exceptions to this rule, to allow for the possibility that the author prayed mentally. But I want you to understand the spirit of this. Any undertaking is always begun with a prayer. *Bhojana-ārambhe prārthanā bhojanamadhye prārthanā bhojanānte prārthanā*, at the beginning of eating there is a prayer, in the middle there is a prayer and at the end there is a prayer. This is true in everything. This is to control the hidden variables.

I heard a talk at the Millennium Summit in which someone said, “Some people do actions, some people pray. Those who pray don’t take responsibility and I am responsible.” I am saying that to say a prayer is to take responsibility, is to acknowledge your limitations. The limitation is not now and then. It is all the way. They say that there are many slips between the cup and the lips. I say that there are also slips between the lips and stomach. The food can go to the windpipe, choking the person. There are slips everywhere. Therefore, one not only has to pray on given occasions, one has to be prayerful all through one’s life. It is pure pragmatism. That is what a Hindu way of living is. And it is true for any practical person, no matter which Lord he is praying to. If you pray in English, God will understand; if you pray in Hebrew he will understand; if you pray in Latin, there is nothing that is ‘Latin and Greek’ for God. He is a linguist. If you pray in Hindi he will understand, and if you pray in Sanskrit, he will feel quite at home because that is his own language. It is a question of understanding Īśvara. One has got to be prayerful in one’s life in order to let helplessness go. Helplessness leads to frustration and life is a series of frustrations. Because of this, one develops angularities before one reaches thirty. One needs to be prayerful.

Finally, there is one thing I want to tell you. In our tradition we say that when you make a journey, you should always pack enough for an extra day. You may have to stay one more day, so you have clothes and everything you need for one more day. You have all that because you have to be prepared. Our forefathers always packed up something extra. Before undertaking a *yātra* they would offer *dānam*. Even today, at the time of marriage, they will offer *dānam*, because they are going to start a *yātra*, a pilgrimage in life. Married life is a pilgrimage, and therefore, they give *dānam*. This giving is packing up something extra. You have to pack up something extra in life every day. That is why we do the daily prescribed rituals, *nitya-karma*. Giving *dānam* is one way by which we pack up what we call the difference between success and failure. It is not that prayer has to be answered all the time. If it is not answered, that does not mean that the prayer did not produce the result. Something else is working against the fulfillment of the desire, and the prayer was not enough to neutralize that. Prayer is *karma*, it is action, it is pragmatism and it is an intelligent way of living.

Two things produce what we call the *anugraha*, *puṇya*, the unseen thing that accounts for success. One is a reaching-out *karma*. I won't call it charity, because I don't believe in charity. It implies that you are giving charity, but you yourself require a lot of charity. We are all the recipients of the charity of so many forces. So how can we talk about charity? Charity is not the word. I reach out and do something that produces *puṇya*.

*vāpi-kūpa-taḍākādi devatāyatanāni ca
annapradāna-ārāmaśca pūrtam ityabhidīyate.*

In those days they used to say that one should build a *vāpi*, a reservoir of water, a way of harvesting water; *kūpa*, a public well; *taḍāka*, a pond for the cattle in the villages; *ādī*, etc., which can include a school, clinic and so on; *devata-āyatanāni*, a temple, an abode for the *devatas*. Then, *annapradāna*, providing food or providing certain opportunities for people to earn their livelihoods; *ārāmaḥ ca*, places of rest and so on. All these, *pūrtam iti abhidīyate*,

are called *pūrta-karma*, karma that produces *puṇya* because your free will is employed here. You need not give, but you give, and that means that you choose to give. That is free will.

Every other action is because of attachment, because of affection, because of friendship or because of a situation where you have empathy. If you are empathetic, you are undergoing pain. Empathetically we give, and that empathy is what generally motivates giving. But any reaching out is *pūrta* and definitely produces *pūnya*. That action that is impelled by empathy also is not totally free. Free will is a hundred percent only in prayer. Think of it. You may say, “Swamiji in distress we pray.” In distress you can hit the wall. You need not pray. Prayer is a one hundred percent expression of free will, and it has to come from maturity. That maturity is the understanding that it has an effect. The understanding that prayer is necessary to take into account the hidden variables.

Especially when you want to change somebody, you had better pray. You can't change your children. You know that very well. “I am fourteen, Mom. Don't advise me. I am fourteen.” ‘Fourteen’ means everything is over. You had better pray! Everything will be okay. Pray. Once upon a time I thought I could change people. That was my thinking. I accepted people in a resident course in India, fifty people. I thought I could change them all. I know it all, I can change them, I can teach them what I know and I can make them spiritually enlightened. They enlightened me before I could do anything. They changed me. All that you can do is try to make people think, make people understand, and pray. That's all one can do. Years can roll by but nobody changes. Pray, otherwise you will feel frustrated, helpless, especially when it come to changing a person. Therefore, do what you can do and pray because prayer is a means, a *karma*, which can be physical (*kāyikam*), oral (*vācīkam*), or mental (*mānasam*).

The gurukulam is here to help you in this, and I want you to make use of this place. Attend camps and come on the weekends. On the

first and third weekends we have regular classes. You can come and learn all about our tradition. Then there are books and tapes which you can use to continue to learn at home. Please understand how valuable this is. One gentleman from Bangladesh told me that there are one crore, ten million, Hindus there, and they can't live there freely. Every day is a problem. A lot of destruction is going on and they live with the threat, "Either change, or get out, or we will kill you." This is this kind of situation we have in Bangladesh and we pray for them. We can be grateful that here we can explore our tradition freely. So make use of the resources at the gurukulam. Thank you all.