

"OUR FATHER" AND COSMIC CONSCIOUSNESS: INSIGHTS INTO A NEW INTERPRETATION

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Introduction

The prayer 'Our Father' brings before us a wider universe, which starts with an inclusive language for all people, and considering all of them as children of a loving father. Nobody is excluded, by way of country, culture and religion. All can pray this prayer of unity with a universal consciousness that we all are children of one Father in heaven. It is interesting to note that Mahatma Gandhi, when he was leading the freedom struggle in India, he started his protest marches with a prayer meeting. Always the prayer meetings were concluded with the prayer of 'Our Father' recited by all, irrespective of religion, culture and caste.

Part I: Call to Cosmo-Divine Consciousness

"Our Father" is a prayer leading us straight to a kind of cosmic consciousness, and to be more correct, to divine consciousness, beyond all levels of consciousness. Cosmos, in fact, is the environmental house of existence in which all human beings together with animals and plants are expected to live in harmony and rhythm. Cosmic consciousness would mean the expansion of our human consciousness to the cosmic dimensions, and because cosmos includes also the immediate expanse of outer space, effectively cosmic consciousness means the expansion of our human consciousness to immeasurable, universal consciousness. 'Our Father' is a typical expression of such a sublime and all-embracing consciousness. Yes, we have a Father in heaven, from whom everything here below and up in the heavens have proceeded. His fatherhood is all-pervading, embracing all, from the heavenly planets down to the earth, and all living and moving

creatures on the earth and especially of all human beings endowed with consciousness.

1. Human Consciousness and its Predicamental Situation

Human consciousness is by nature an embodied consciousness. By the very fact it is embodied, it is limited. This means that human consciousness is a limited consciousness. Consciousness in itself, by nature, is unlimited. Why should consciousness be limited? Consciousness means simple awareness. 'Awareness' as such does not include the notion of limitation. Awareness on the contrary, does include the notion of Being, because without a primordial form of existence nothing can ever be thought of. So, the ancient Indian scripture says: "In the beginning this was only Being" (*Chandogya Upanishad*, VII.1.1). This Being was endowed with consciousness. In Christianity we say, "In the beginning was the Word" (Jn. 1:1). The 'Word' is what we utter, what we utter is what we keep in our mind. Our mind reflects what is deep down in our consciousness. The Word therefore is a pointer to the consciousness in God. About this Word we say, "Born of the Father", i.e., born of that primordial Being, and because He is the source of everything, we call him the Father. Jesus, who is the Word who became flesh, i.e., the divine consciousness in human flesh, taught us to address God as 'Our Father'. Jesus is the exact image of this Father. "He is the visible face of the invisible Father" (Col. 1:15). God alone has divine consciousness by nature, which is consciousness *par excellence*, unlimited, all pervading and all knowing. Even cosmic consciousness will be a lower expression to designate this divine consciousness of God. It is the simple, unlimited, all pervading consciousness of God. It contains everything and is the source of everything, but refuses to become anything in particular. But this loving Father, in His loving kindness, decided to share his consciousness with human beings. So he said: "Let us create him in our own image" (Gen. 1:26). What is this image? God by nature is nameless and formless. Strictly speaking God does not have any image. But as we see in the

Genesis, all of us are called to participate in the divine image of God. God's life and image is His very consciousness. What we call soul is a reflection of this consciousness. God and soul, both are spirits. Spirit by nature is consciousness. Naturally, God is infinite and, by that reason, also incomprehensible and ineffable. But the human consciousness is limited, embodied and through body very much attached and sometimes even enslaved to this world in which we live. In spite of all these limitations, unlike animals, the human consciousness is privileged to rise up and transcend all structures of limitation, not only of the cosmos or of the body, but even of the mind and thoughts and straightly enter into the mysteries of God, into the very consciousness of God. The prayer 'Our Father' is an expression of this freedom given to all human beings.

2. The Rise of Human Consciousness to Upper Layers of Consciousness, Cosmic or Divine

'Our Father' is basically an expression of relation. When Aristotle divided the earthly realities into categories, such as, quantity, quality etc. he also spoke of 'relation' which is a very subtle, yet very much part of our ordinary life. We all exist in a network of relationship. Relationship is somehow a participation in the being of the other. We all participate in one human nature. Therefore, we are inter-related. But the intensity of this relationship varies due to other factors. Country is such a factor which further limits the range of relationship. Blood is another factor of restriction in the circle of relationship. One's own family people are much smaller than one's own country people. This means that the human consciousness, as it is realized here on earth, is with degrees of limitations. On the other hand, each degree of limitation adds particularity and depth to the individuality of the person. Again there are special relationships with two human individuals, such as, marriage (husband and wife), discipleship (master and disciple). Each one adds new dimension of depth, but limit the extension of this relation. Relation is always some kind of an extension of one's orientation to the other. The embodied consciousness, as human

consciousness, has to strike a healthy balance between these two trends of relationships, i.e., the body bound and Spirit bound. The more emphasis we give to the body-consciousness, the more it gets encased in bodily measurements and dimensions. But the Spirit, the soul, by nature has power to transcend all these limitations.

3. Meditation/Contemplation as the Way to Higher Stages of Consciousness

Meditation is presented in the modern world as a way to the refinement of consciousness. Several *gurus* and masters from the Orient and also non-religious teachers advocate the way of meditation. Meditation can be understood in different levels, as a rational exercise of concentration or as a perfect stillness of human consciousness beyond the level of sensitivity and rationality. Patanjali, the author of *Yoga sutra*; a book considered to be written after Buddhism and before Christianity, presents the steps of meditation. They are: taking a comfortable posture, entering into one's own breathing rhythm as a means to regulate the flow of life in one's own body, silencing of the senses and the mind and entering into perfect equanimity a divine serenity. This means that by meditation one is called to rise above the levels of knowledge controlled by sensation and rationalization. The breathing meditation, with the help of a suitable *mantra* is a step in the beginning. Once the bodily rhythm of breathing is in order, one can concentrate better. Patanjali also suggests that we have to silence our senses which are very much attached to sense objects in the world. The world is our cosmic layer which contains all the objects of senses such as, light for the eyes, smell for nose, sound for ears etc. All the five senses have their own objects in the cosmos. The cosmos is full of sense objects. One who is not meditative and wants to enjoy life, as the prodigal son in his first stage, looks at the cosmos only for the food material to gratify his senses. This man will be devoid of inner depth, drifted away by the wave of desires and will find his life in distress and inner turmoil. Therefore, one who has to meditate has to withdraw their senses from the alluring

sense object of this world. This is sometimes done by what we call 'awareness meditation', that is, becoming aware of our human body, limb by limb, from top to toes. This is only an exercise which may help us to put our senses into deeper silence. Silence of the body is a must for fruitful meditation. This does not however mean that everybody should practice this kind of methodic awareness meditation. Great saints like Mother Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, Francis Assisi were great contemplatives who knew to put their senses into silence, not necessarily practicing awareness meditation. What is important is our body, our senses must be in silence.

After silencing the body we have to silence our mind. This is done by what we call concentration that is fixing our attention on one point or object alone. The mind has a character of jumping continuously from one object to another. This we call distraction. Therefore, the mind should be trained to meditate by concentration. Breathing meditation, with a suitable *mantra*, lead us to higher states of concentration.

Once concentration is possible, meditation becomes easy. The soul now begins to contemplate what it wants to realize in its own life. For example, a Christian would like to focus on Jesus Christ, concentrate on Him. Here meditation slowly moves into a contemplative look, often called as prayer of simplicity, prayer of quiet. This contemplative look is very important, because it already presupposes the silencing of the senses and the mind, and surrender to the divine master and readiness to imbibe the spirit of the master into oneself. Breathing meditation with a *mantra* may help this process of giving oneself to God and receiving God's Spirit into oneself. The appropriate *mantras* are being made or given by the master to the aspiring disciples. This contemplative prayer is very important because it is during this period of contemplation the inner transformation of soul takes place, the transformation of human consciousness into divine consciousness. St. John of the Cross says; "The higher portion of my soul (mind),

like the lower part (senses), also being at rest, with respect to its desires and faculties I went forth to the divine union of the love of God" (*Dark Night of the Soul*, II, 24, I).

What I want to say is that both traditions, Indian as well as Christian, demand the silencing or transcending the levels of sense and reason to achieve the higher state of contemplation which works out the transformation of the human consciousness.

4. Higher Consciousness as a Consciousness of Unbounded Love

The call to rise above is a call from God, who is our loving Father in heaven, who has called us to participate in his own divine consciousness. We become children of God only by participating in God's consciousness. We cannot call any one in the street my father. There must be father's blood in us. The stream of blood flowing through our arteries or veins is what keeps our bodily life in order. In other words, blood represents life, of course bodily life. But in the life of the Spirit, it is consciousness that takes the place of blood. God's life is pure and blissful consciousness. Our heavenly Father wants that, as his children on earth, we transcend the limitation structures of our consciousness due to embodiment and consequently time-space dimensions of our life. Rise to cosmic consciousness is possible, because of this basic call from our heavenly Father, the seed of which he has placed in the heart of his children. This seed, according to our Lord, must grow, flower and bear fruit. Jesus explains how the seed of divine consciousness in us should grow, expand and fill the entire arena of our consciousness, that is, the Holy Spirit who lives in the cave of our hearts, should send his light and delight to our mind, enlighten and transform it, empower it to transcend the limitation of rational thinking, rise into a contemplative gaze of God as he is in himself, and as operating from within us. Refer to the parables of yeast and dough, the mustard seed and of the sower. In fact, it is the awakening of the divine consciousness in us, which beams forth its rays of light and delight to the human heart and soul, to the mind

and the senses and leads it to participate in the infinite expansion of divine consciousness. This seed of divine consciousness in us we call the inner eye, the third eye, the luminous eye (St. Ephrem) which is practically identified with the Holy Spirit abiding in us. The third eye is the eye of faith, beyond senses and reason, by which we come directly in touch with God. "Faith is that admirable means of advancing to God, our Goal" (St. John of the Cross, *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, II.2.1). This means that our consciousness transcends the limitations imposed on it by senses and the mind and expands into wider dimensions, embracing all that are from God, who alone is our real Father in heaven. Our consciousness becomes a consciousness of unbounded love including all. It is consciousness that expands, becoming 'cosmic', i.e., lovingly embracing all that is in the cosmos. To such a soul characterized by faith, all that are in the world become symbols of God. The soul rises easily from the symbols to the symbolized. However, it sees the entire universe in a unitary vision, in an all-enfolding embrace of God. Believers in God easily come to such a stage of God-mysticism, where God or Jesus Christ becomes all in all. The outer layers of our consciousness, visible or mental, all are symbols of God's heavenly beauty and love. Once we come in touch with God, and we are awakened by His consciousness, our inner eye is opened. Then we see the face of God in everything, especially the face of Christ through whom God, Our Father, created everything. The cosmic consciousness in their faith is eventually the consciousness of cosmic Christ. The soul now sees Christ in everything, since everything is made for him, in him and through him.

On the other hand, non-believers who also follow the transformation of human consciousness step by step, may call this stage as nature-mysticism and very often name it as cosmic consciousness. This secular terminology is used by several *gurus* from the Orient, to liberate this state of consciousness from the particular terminologies of different religions. So, they make

distinctions of God-mysticism, soul-mysticism (*Atman*-mysticism) and nature-mysticism. All these three mysticisms mark the rise of human consciousness to a cosmic level where guided by their own traditions or religious backgrounds they see the unitary thread pervading all creation in God or Jesus Christ (God-mysticism), in the divine *Atman*/Self (soul-mysticism) or in nature-mysticism. The word 'cosmic consciousness' is usually used as one applicable to all, devoid of religious particularities. When Oriental masters and secular promoters of meditation led the West and initiated the disciples into meditation and higher levels of consciousness, they preferred to use a non-religious word to mark this higher state of consciousness and named it cosmic consciousness. This word is thus applied in meditation to all disciples coming from different backgrounds, such as, Buddhist who never use the word 'God', Hindus who very deeply believe in the abiding divine Self (*Atman*), and also a vast number of humanist and secularist who do not have any religion as such, but love meditation and the transformation of human consciousness to cosmic consciousness or to any other unnamed state of consciousness.

In the prayer 'Our Father' Jesus introduces us to this higher level of consciousness which is a transformed consciousness characterized by the divine Spirit into a web of undivided love, embracing all. The prayer continues saying 'Thy kingdom come'. The kingdom envisaged here is the heavenly kingdom of our Heavenly Father, where everyone sees the other in Jesus Christ, welcomes the other as he/she welcomes Jesus Christ and serves and even dies for the other, as Jesus Himself died for us. Jesus wants that the world we live should be a reflection of the heavenly paradise where the immaculate love embraces all, and all beings, humans and non-humans, enjoy the rhythmic flow of divine harmony through all layers of our existence, the mental, the physical and the cosmic. When this is achieved, the prayer 'thy kingdom come' is realized.

Part II: Called to Live Cosmo-Divine Consciousness on Earth.

The second part of the prayer of universal love is an invitation to live this unbounded love on earth. Embodied as we are, we have a body-dimension and its many concerns, which are to be accepted and transcended.

1. Body Consciousness

All embodied beings are endowed with body awareness. Body needs food and health. Concern for the welfare of the body is salutary and is seen even in plants and animals. This means that every living creature is endowed with an inner awareness of self preservation and growth. This becomes a conscious concern in the human beings. But this concern can lead them to unwanted worries and anxieties. Hence the Lord warned us: "Do not be worried about the food and drink you need in order to stay alive or about cloths for your body" (Mt. 6:25).

Body does need food and drink. The cosmos is full of food items. It provides food for all the senses, such as light for eyes, sound for ears, smell for nose, touch for skin and finally bread, fruit and water for mouth. The cosmos is our own outer layer of foods. The Upanishad called them *annam* (food layer, Taittiriya III. I). But the same passage invites us also to the further layers of life, mind, contemplation (faith) and bliss. But the human being can fail to advance to further layers and stop short at any of the lower layers, e.g. of food or life, namely of bodily satisfaction and pleasures. Therefore Jesus opens the second part of the prayer addressing the problem of food. "Give us this day our daily food" (Mt. 6:11). The teaching is clear. Food is needed; but one should not accumulate too much, like the rich fool in the gospel (Lk. 12:16). Your consciousness is not to be kept bound by the over-concern of the need of food. Rise up to the Kingdom of God; everything else will be given to you. (Mt. 6:33). Even in the midst of satisfying the needs of the body, we should not forget our call to live in a higher and wider level of consciousness, the universal and divine.

2. The Fellowship Consciousness

After dealing with the problems in the lowest level of awareness, Jesus takes us to the consciousness of the human community. We are called to live as children of our Father in heaven. Prayer began with this addressing; "Our Father in Heaven". This should be always kept in mind, even when we deal with the food layer, life layer, and mind layer etc. The basic call is to live united in love, which has no boundary according to the mind of Jesus. Just like God is boundless, so be your love. Nobody can set boundaries for the expansion of your consciousness. It can reach God and every other human being, including your bitterest enemy. Hence love becomes really cosmic and divine. But, embodied as we are, we fail and fall. This is understandable. But let the sun not set before you are reconciled. Jesus teaches us to pray: "forgive our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us" (Mt. 6:12). By reconciliation relation is renewed, enarmoured and vivified. The Kingdom of God about which we spoke in the first part is to be lived here on earth. Kingdom is the kingdom of love, a kingdom of mutual acceptance and divine harmony. Hence human relation plays a great role. Relation, by nature, is a reality that is feeble and tender. This is because it does not have an existence of its own, but exists in between persons. Therefore it is to be maintained very carefully. Aristotle defines relation as "*Esse in alio*", i.e., "being in the other". Hence the essence of relation is orientation to the other. As mention above, real relation exists between two persons founded on events in life, such as, husband and wife, based on marriage, gurú and disciple, based on formation given and received etc. The Kingdom of God is maintained on this earth through good and salutary relations: relation between God, our Father and between brothers and sisters on earth, in heaven and in purgatory. It is a wheel of life (*Dharmachakra*) of which God is the centre, the hub, and rim, the world, and all individuals are the spokes which are related to the hub and the rim (the world). When all the spokes are in their own position, the wheel rolls in rhythm and harmony.

Thus we have the Kingdom of heaven on earth. Therefore Jesus warns us that the relation between us, if infringed, should be rectified immediately. Otherwise life will not roll smoothly. It is good to think that India has a national flag with this wheel of *Dharma* on it and a motto, *satyam-eva-jayate*: "truth alone shall win". This means that all relations are ultimately founded on truth which is God, the hub of the wheel. Our relation is always with the hub and with each other, the equidistant and equally sized spokes. No spoke should think that I am the centre. This will destroy the centre of gravity of the wheel and make our life miserable. Hence Jesus suggests to reconcile immediately with other 'spokes', because all of us need forgiveness from God. The wheel will not have the rhythmic flow of existence, if not fixed well on the hub which is God. In other words, we need forgiveness from God that we be founded on God. Let us do the same to the other. Let the wheel of divine rhythm roll on and on.

3. Temptation and Call to Transcendental Consciousness

There must be perfect rhythm everywhere. Any disorder, breach or offence must be rectified immediately. The divinely shaped consciousness must not be left under the sway of the opposing forces. The children of God should not lose the freedom of smooth and friendly movement.

Divine harmony in human life is a gift we receive from God. Whatever that is truly divine can only come from God as a gift. We do not deserve the divine life by nature of our existence. But this can be received. God created the first parents with this divine gift of consciousness which made them persons capable of making their own decision by the power of consciousness which was given to them. But this was embodied consciousness. Body and the cosmos in which the body is placed, can draw this precious gift of consciousness to the outer layers of the body, such as the cosmos, senses and mind. This inordinate pull against the soft and sweet reigning rhythm of God in their life, we call temptation. The fact that temptation is possible, says that the consciousness which

mankind received as a gift, was not yet everlastingly established, instead was in the danger of an option to lose it or save it. The serpent comes into the paradise of divine rhythm as a symbol of distorted consciousness, like a *Kundala*, the ear-ring which turns back into itself and thus moves away from God. All temptations are invitations to turn away from God, the hub and centre, to oneself, to one's own self-gratification without God. Thus the temptation comes from the outer layers, that is, from the cosmic layer of food, all kinds of foods, from the bodily layer of pleasure and further from the mental layer of pride, prestige and position in this world. These are the three outer-layers of human being in the age-old Indian theology of *Pancha-Kosha* (the five layers of consciousness) (*Tattiriya Up* III 1.1– III 6.1). We can see that more or less the same dynamic is operative in the temptations, which Satan brings to Jesus (Mt. 4:1-11). Because human soul is embodied and body is formed from and placed in the world and even brain is a part of our body, in these three layers we feel the pull from the body side. Thus temptation for food, the food of all the senses, for the pleasures of life, better amenities and comforts and also for better position and prestige, all proceed from the lower layers. These are different kinds of boosting our ego. These temptations are to be overcome by moving to higher layers of consciousness. The next two layers of the *Pancha-Kosha* (five layers) are *vijnana* and *ananda*, namely, wisdom, which is a higher understanding and bliss of the divine presence. *Vijnana* is *visesham Jananam*: superior knowledge and is interpreted as faith.

Faith is a higher knowledge, because it is a response to the light coming from God, which we call revelation. In the *pancha-kosha* theory, after the fifth layer God dwells in us as our inner most Self. This is in fact the Holy Spirit dwelling in us whom Jesus had promised. Holy Spirit comes into us as light (*vijnanam*) and delight (*anandam*). This spirit of Jesus must be awakened in us, that is, we should receive the light of the Spirit and give our mind and body to its operation of cleansing, illumining and divinizing. The result is a

kind of inner joy or bliss which neither *annam* (food) nor *prana* (bodily breath of life) nor *manas* (brain and rational thinking) can give. Once we are in faith level, we see everything through the eye of faith. This eye is the luminous eye of the Holy Spirit. We are in a different and higher level of consciousness. Our temptation from the lower three layers are overcome by the power of the Spirit who will lead us into all the truth about God (Jn. 16:13). Always it is through higher consciousness we overcome our problems in the lower level. In the prayer 'Our Father' Jesus teaches us to pray "lead us not into temptation", temptations rising from all the lower layers, as mentioned above. Let the grace of God and the power of the Spirit be with us which enlighten and empower us. By this we participate in the consciousness of God, and rise above our ego-centred desire and passion. Participating in God's consciousness means to participate in the unbounded and unconditional love of God which is universal and divine at the same time.

Conclusion:

"Our Father" is the best prayer Jesus taught his disciples. It is a call to come out of our narrow and self-centred consciousness of blood, country, caste, and culture and enter into the consciousness of a divine childhood and universal brotherhood and sisterhood. There is no isolated person or even thing in this world. All are united by the physical network of waves being emitted by every body and the spiritual network of divine love which necessarily demands an expansion of our consciousness to universal dimension. It is a call to be of global consciousness, but in its essence very much different from the dynamics of globalisation-consciousness of our time. What is happening in globalization is converting the universe of love into a market of universal commodities of bitter bargain, which is available for those who can afford to it. The poor are literally or even by anticipation excluded from this world of bargain. An artificial and unhealthy drink like coco-cola is given for Rs.10 per glass whereas a healthier and local drink of lime-juice is available for Rs.2. But coco-cola or Pepsi has become a status symbol. So the

rich go for that and the lime-water is fast disappearing from the tiny shops on the roadside. In globalization it is the global commodities that are made available to the satisfaction of our greed, not need; but in the prayer 'our Father' it is our consciousness that expands and embraces all in a global and universal love. So by introducing the prayer "our Father" Jesus clearly calls us to a far superior level of human consciousness, a consciousness of universal love, mutual acceptance and self-giving. It is diametrically opposed to accumulating world commodities for one's own enjoyment.

Jesus concludes the prayer, saying "deliver us from evil". Anything that destroys or de-values the divine rhythm of love is evil, is in the processing of making a self-centred world of individual assertion and mutual destruction. This is not what we need to live peacefully in this world. What we need is universal love and not global markets. True love is the expansion of our consciousness, which enfolds the universe with mutual concern and spirit of self-dedication for the other. We cannot have a higher consciousness or a better world than the world envisaged in "Our Father".