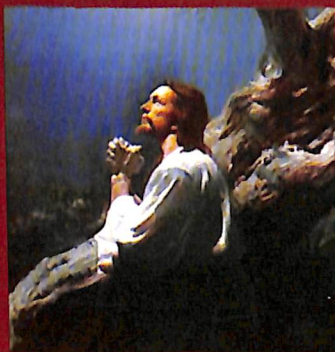


# Prayer and Power



**V.F. Vineeth**

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# **PRAYER AND POWER**

Second Revised Edition  
with two new chapters on  
"Contemplative Prayer"

**V.F. Vineeth CMI**

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**Author: V.F. Vineeth CMI**

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## PREFACE

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I remember reading the story of a holy pilgrim who went about asking the question: "How can I pray always?" Making his long journey, he visited university professors and reputed theologians who told him marvelous things about prayer. But he did not get the answer he was looking for.

Prayer is not just talking about prayer, not even saying prayers written by someone, however, sublime the wording be.

Real prayer is an Event, which takes place in the depth of one's own heart. It is a movement, a leap towards Transcendence, a sigh from the bottom of one's own being.

Real prayer plunges us down into the abyss of nothingness, just as it lifts us up to the heights of heavenly bliss. It is our cleanser and comforter, our comrade and consoler. It empowers us, enlightens us and fills our heart with dismay and discernment.

It leads us through the blazing fire, burns away the scales of our scars. It guides us through the flood and washes the filth from our wounds.

Though it visits us as light and delight, it takes us into a blinding darkness, which later reveals itself as the prelude to the overflowing light. Whether through the darkest clouds or the brightest sunshine, prayer takes us to the other shore, where the day never ends, the light never fades. There the soul will see face to face that Immortal Face for which she has longed all the days of her life, and which is now seen shining on her own face.

*Prayer and Power* which I humbly present to all who love prayer is a collection of simple meditations on prayer as they emerge from the serene atmosphere of an ashram. Vidyavanam, the wood of wisdom by name, which produced this booklet is a serene habitat of birds and bushes, rocks and trees, all of which whispers words of wisdom to each of us.

I wish that the readers may relish and realize the joy and blessings of prayer, as they meditatively read these prayerful reflections.

I would like to place on record my gratitude to Asian Trading Corporation, Bangalore, especially to Nigel Fernandez, who has accepted the suggestion for a joint venture, which made this publication easily possible. I also gratefully remember Miss Kathrine, Fr. Saju Chackalackal,

both of whom carefully went through the manuscript, made many valuable suggestions, which are incorporated into the present text. Selfless service is always fruit-bearing and lifts our hearts up. Yes, you have this book on your desk: *Prayer and Power.*

## A Word of Appreciation

*The dawn appeared and the morning breeze stirred. The birds left their nests and silent hills far away echoed their song.*

*Yes, it was in this setting that Fr. Vineeth CMI, wrote this book "Prayer and Power." It expresses a new way of looking at Prayer and Power. I was deeply touched by the author's words of wisdom, presented in a simple, unique and yet in a deep way. It is a soul-stirring book. It transformed and awoke in me the admiration, wonder and reverence for the Divine in me and I became aware of the Spirit and the Power within me. It left me with a sense of wonder and awe.*

*Though the book is presented in a simple language, the message is poignant and clear— that Prayer arises from deep within us all.*

*It is a book which breaks the traditional and the rigid understanding of prayer and gives a beautiful and lasting message that in this cosmic world, God lives in each one of us— and all living things are interconnected in the cycle of God's love.*

**Sr. Anita**  
Presentation Convent, Egmore

## To the Lord of Boundless Beauty

*Lord of boundless beauty,  
All beauties are finite and futile without thee.  
Time and again you tell me this.  
Every time when you send your messengers to me  
You adorn them with this fresh loveliness of yours,  
Each one unveiling yet another aspect of  
Your inexhaustible beauty.*

*How can I thank you for this boundless gift!  
How you are carried in all of them!  
How you unveil your face through each of them!*

*O inexhaustible loveliness,  
Who can fathom the bottomless ocean of your love  
The waves of which reach me everyday  
And wash away my lingering prejudice  
That I have seen thy face.  
No, thy face is yet to be unveiled,  
The glimpses of which I have seen  
Through every face you have sent to me.*

*This is my prayer, O Lord.*

*Let your face shine on all who approach me.*

*Let your word be awakened in all of them.*

*Let your light illumine all of them.*

*Let me not block their onward march*

*To your immaculate truth and lovely brilliance.*



## Chapter I

# PRAYER AND POVERTY

**"Of his own free will he gave up all he had"  
(Phil. 2:7).**

It was dusk. From the little mount of meditation the western horizon looked marvelous. The glimmering rays of the setting sun still lingered in the sky. It was pleasantly cool and the panoramic view of hills and valleys, lakes and lagoons was beautiful. The sight was so serene, silent and bewitchingly enrapturing that one was led to the hidden presence of that One who created the mountains and the cloud of the vast horizon. Yes, "through Him God made all things; not one thing in all creation was made without him" (Jn. 1:3). He is reflected everywhere. It is His Face that is moulded in the clouds and reflected in the lakes. He is all in all.

He deigned to come down in the form of you and me. He became a servant on earth, possessing

nothing, wanting nothing. Like a wandering monk he walked around, with his attention fixed on his Father. He was free, detached and dedicated to the Father and His people. A man of Being, bereft of possessiveness, he passed through the lanes of Palestine, loved his people and served them with his heart and soul. He met many from the crowd. He fed them, freed them and healed them. His wealth was his being and power went out from him.

Many came to him. One would-be disciple requested him: "Master, may I follow you wherever you go." He replied: "The foxes have holes and the birds have their nests, but the Son of Man has no where to lie down and rest" (Lk. 9:58). The disciple was welcome to follow; but where to? This remained a mystery and demanded total freedom on the side of the disciple. Discipleship is an option, an unconditional, unwavering option for the master and his ideal. Poverty is the power of transcendental freedom by which we rise above everything and turn only to God.

Jesus, the poor, is to be meditated upon. That is the way prayer, as meditation, will lead us to the true spirit of poverty. The famous Indian dictum reads: "what you meditate that you become."<sup>1</sup> If you really want to become poor, meditate upon the image of Jesus, the poor. To be free of every instinct

of possessiveness is the essence of poverty. Those who are blessed with the Spirit are free to possess the kingdom of God. Therefore Jesus said, "Happy are those who know they are spiritually poor, the kingdom of heaven belongs to them" (Mt. 5:3).

Here we see the power of prayer. To be devoid of desires, to be free of possessions is a difficult goal to realize. For this to happen our way of understanding truth needs to change. It should not be a mere rational understanding, but a realizing reflection of the truth that has been received. "To know is to become," the Indian dictum repeats with a slight variation. There is no higher knowledge than this, than being transformed into that which is known. So to be really poor, one has to put on the form of Christ, the poor. Any amount of study on Jesus Christ, the poor, will not make us poor, because such knowledge is in the mind, and the realization of poverty is in our being. A continual movement from mind to being takes place in meditation. What you meditate enters deeply into your being. Meditation is not rationalization. It is admiration and wonder. What you admire you appreciate. What you appreciate you appropriate. And so you are slowly transformed.

Our spirituality is very simple: to become like Christ. If Jesus is simple, I too become simple. If

Jesus is poor, I too become poor. Once we are awakened by faith, it is as simple as this: let us copy Jesus into our life. This does not need a degree in philosophy nor theological expertise. What it demands is this: that we look at Jesus with love, affection and admiration. Then the Spirit of Jesus will enter into us and slowly transforms us. Thus the disciple becomes transformed into the likeness of Jesus. "Always formed by the form of That," said Ramanuja, an ancient Indian devotee of Lord Krishna. What he meant by this expression was that the mind and consciousness of the disciple, is to be transformed by the form of his master. For Christians this form is Jesus, the poor, who took the form of the servant.

### **The Kenotic Model of Jesus**

St. Paul presents Jesus as a model. He says:

The attitude you should have is the one that Christ Jesus had: He always had the nature of God, but he did not think that by force he should try to become equal with God. Instead of this, of his own free will he gave up all he had (Phil. 2:5-7).

I am called to be like Jesus. For this purpose we have to put on the attitude of Jesus. Hence, the model is ultimately a question of attitudinal option. Every disciple should participate in the

consciousness of the master. Discipleship grows as the consciousness of the master is absorbed more and more by the disciple. Our value system and life-style will follow our consciousness. Hence, putting on Jesus' consciousness is the most important part of modelling ourselves on Jesus. It should not be confounded by developing an erudite consciousness about Jesus. This is knowledge. This is not Jesus' consciousness. Our holiness does not depend on our scientific knowledge about Jesus, but becoming one with the consciousness of Jesus. Hence Paul says: "The attitude you should have is the one that Christ Jesus had" (Phil. 2:5). This attitude of Jesus is not of having but simply of being. And so we see that he stripped off all his possessions including His divine greatness and glory.

### **The Attitudes of Being and of Having**

Writers often speak about two basic attitudes: of being and of having. In short, the difference between them can be summarized as follows: the "person of being" takes delight in the being of the other. On the contrary, the "person of having" needs to possess the other. The "person of being" too has his/her human rights and is conscious about them. But the delight is always found in the reality rather than in the possession of that reality, whether person or a thing. On the contrary, the "person of

having" forgets the human rights of the other and finds his/her delight in the act of possessing rather than in pure being. The "person of being" subordinates having to being, whereas the "person of having" subordinates being to having. This inversion of values lies at the bottom of all unjust power structures.

Two women came to Solomon, asking him to judge to whom a baby child belonged. Both of them wanted to *have* the baby. Solomon put them to the test. The heart of the test was this: which of the two women was characterized by a "being attitude"? Hence, he said: "I will cut the baby into two pieces and each of you shall *have* a piece." On hearing this, the real mother burst out and said: "let the child be." But the other woman, who was not the real mother, yet wanted to possess the baby, shouted saying: "yes, let it be done." The dynamics at work here is that the real mother, as a person of being, is ready to subordinate her right of *having* for the welfare of the *being* of the baby, whereas the unreal mother thinks that the being of the baby should be no more if the baby is not in her possession, or an object of her *having*. The desire to have blinds our vision and forces us to ignore the being of the other person. Not only was Jesus a man of being, never wanting to possess what belonged to others, but He went further and

relinquished what he could have rightly possessed and so found his delight in pure being. This is what we all should try to become.

In the paradise Adam and Eve were very happy. Unbroken rhythm and harmony made paradise a heavenly abode on earth. What was the secret of this heaven on earth? It was nothing but the attitude of being that characterized both Adam and Eve and, consequently, the whole creation that was at their disposal. God was the only centre. All beings, including the humans, danced around this centre, like spokes around the hub of a wheel, in eternal rhythm. All beings were happy and the humans relished this happiness with consciousness, raising the whole universe to God in praise and adoration. But sin distorted this happiness. One day the desire to possess, to have, crept into the mind of Adam and Eve. The instinct of possessiveness characterized their consciousness. The human being produced an Ego, *ahamkara*, which was a puffed-up consciousness of the real self. The Ego wanted to dominate everything, even God, if it were possible. The rhythm of the paradise was broken. Suffering began. Human consciousness was characterized by selfish motivations, the thought of 'mine'. The attitude of 'being' changed into that of 'having'. Sin brought the "having attitude" into the world and thus we

lost paradise. From then onwards humanity has been constantly struggling to restore paradise lost.

There is a beautiful Upanishadic text, which shows how we should relate to the beings of the world with an attitude of being rather than of having. The text says:

The earth is like honey to all beings. All beings are like honey to the earth. The shining immortal person who resides in the earth resides in your body.

The sun is like honey to all beings. All beings are like honey to the sun. The shining immortal person who abides in the sun abides in your eye.<sup>2</sup>

The text continues in this way relating how each element and being is honey to all the other; and then concludes saying:

Humans are honey to all beings and all beings are like honey to humans. The shining immortal person who dwells in all beings dwells in the human heart.<sup>3</sup>

This text gives us a clue as to how paradise lost might be restored. We need all to live with an attitude of being towards the other; and so, be like honey to everyone and to everything. The result will be that everything will be like honey to us as



well. Paradise is not a matter of what we possess, but a matter of the attitude we maintain with regard to all beings. The attitude of having oppresses, subordinates and exploits the other, whereas the attitude of being elevates, respects and liberates the other. Paradise is something we can still restore, provided we are ready to change our attitude and so put on the attitude of Jesus.

The shining immortal person who abides in everything is here understood as the Word who was from the beginning and who is the architect of all creation. The Word abides in everything. When the Word became flesh He decided to be as simple as a servant, stripped of all 'having' for which the human hearts crave, even though He was entitled to possess all. In fact, He alone has the right to possess all. None of us has such an absolute right, because none of us has anything that is not received from someone else. In order to re-establish paradise on earth we have to be liberated from the instinct of possessiveness which has been ours since the first sin in paradise. Jesus now shows us the way for this liberation. Be a person of being. Give up the attitude of having. Be servant to all and take your delight in the being of the other. Meditate this Jesus and become like him. Remember the age-old dictum: "What you meditate, that you become." Meditation is profound prayer and has the power

to change our consciousness and transform our attitudes.

### **Poverty as Moving from Having to Being**

Since sin has distorted the human consciousness, and the attitude of having and possessiveness has disrupted the divine reflection of the attitude of being in the human consciousness, we have to develop a counter attitude of non-possessiveness and freedom in all our actions and relations with other beings. This is something hard to achieve. But this is the essence of the virtue of poverty and is not only an obligation for those who profess poverty but also for all, so that we may create a more human and humane world to live in. Religions, one after another, have proposed, promoted and propagated this ideal of poverty.

Buddha wanted to put a stop to the suffering of the world. He meditated. He came out illumined and said that desire is at the root of all evil and suffering. Give up desire and you will have a better world to live in. It is hidden desire that vitiates our actions and enslaves us. Action brings about bondage because of the desire of having. Therefore, the ideal is said to be action without desire. Buddha proposed an eight-fold path by which we can act in perfect balance of mind.

Centuries later the *Gita* articulates it as follows:

Surrendering all actions to me, with your thoughts resting on the Self, free from all thoughts of ego and possessiveness, you engage in your battle without any fever of anxiety or excitement.<sup>4</sup>

The ideal proposed here is that we perform our actions with a spirit of detachment, so that the hidden desire may not bind us and leave us free. Ill-founded desires are chains that bind us to this world. Hence, to be without desire is proposed as the ideal. This does not, however, mean that one should not have any kind of attachment whatsoever. What one should be careful about is enslaving attachments. No attachment, however necessary, should be enslaving. No being except God is everlasting. Hence, an absolute attachment to anything that is not God cannot enable true liberation and ultimate freedom. So let us be detached from everything and attached to God alone. Let us integrate all our human attachments into this one central attachment to God. Then they become holy, liberating and salutary. Hence, the *Gita* says: "Surrender all your actions to me, let your mind be centred on me (the Self) and be free of ego (*nirahamkara*) and its attitude of having (*nirmamo*)..."<sup>5</sup> An attitude of attachment to Jesus, to whom we surrender all our actions and through whom we operate, will liberate both our own selves

and our world. This is poverty, and actions done with this spirit of poverty will make our world more and more human and convert it into a paradise worth living.

Jesus wants this attitude of detachment in all his disciples. So when he sent out his first disciples to preach his message to the world, he made it very clear with what kind of an attitude they should go into the world.

Don't take anything with you on your journey except a stick – no bread, no beggar's bag, no money in your pockets. Wear sandals, but don't carry an extra shirt (Mk. 6:8-9).

The Disciples were very eager to take up their mission and preach. Jesus, too, had waited for this moment. But the exhortation he gave them at the time of their departure was perhaps startling for them. Jesus was instilling in their mind and heart a new value system. He made it very clear that his kingdom is preached or built, not with money nor with power, but by the presence of the being of his disciples. Their wealth was their being and not what they possessed. Hence Jesus forbade them to possess or carry anything except the power of the Spirit with which he had invested them. They were all asked to be men of being. They preached, returned with great enthusiasm and reported their

experience to Jesus. They shared, how to their great astonishment they had witnessed that evil submit to their command. Jesus warned them telling them not to take delight in what they had seen happen, but only if their names were written in the Book of Life in heaven. Those who are of pure being are in the Book of Life. Those who rejoice on account of their own actions are not necessarily entered into the Book of Eternal Life. Jesus was taking them a step further, asking that they even be detached from the feelings of satisfaction and exultation that had arisen as a consequence of their actions. Be free of all attachments whether terrestrial or mental. Freedom is the essence of poverty.

### **Poverty as Freedom from Bondage**

The contemporary discussions on DNA analysis tell us that a large part of our personal composition, perhaps even the whole of it, is already encoded in the heart of our human self. Deep down in the chromosomes hidden in the nucleus of the cell, there is the code of our tastes and tendencies; the traits of our well or ill being. We, as human persons, are not absolutely free. Though we are the abode of the Spirit, so many factors around us, including the delineation of DNA, affect our being and action. And so we are affected in our thinking, feeling, decision and action,

by the patterns and history of distortion and restoration handed down to us through both our parental lineage and cultural traditions.

Does this mean an inescapable determinism? Not at all. The human is not just 'flesh' transmitted through generation; it is also a unit of enfleshed divine consciousness, which we call soul. The soul, the divine in the human, struggles to rise above the flesh. The souls of all humans need to be liberated from the clutches or grips of the flesh, a domain which is far deeper than a mere influence from outside. There is an encoded blue print in the heart of our own human cell. We cannot cut it off from our flesh; but we can rise above it by virtue of the spirit within us. Here we need grace, the illumination of the mind, the inspiration of the heart and an ability to rise above. This is the work of the Spirit. Beyond the encoded DNA, there is the Spirit, the *Atman*, God's very consciousness within us. The power of this consciousness, which is a gift humans have received in and through Jesus Christ, enables us the integration of flesh and Spirit; the Spirit illumines and purifies the flesh from within. As the flames of fire penetrate a log of wood and burn it from within, until it is totally transformed into a blazing piece of fire-wood, so, says St. John of the Cross, the Spirit penetrates and purges the inner depth of the soul and body and completely liberates

the person from the clutches of the flesh. It is only then that a person becomes totally and truly free to love his Lord and master, his friend and spouse. This being-set-free from one's own deeply engraved inclinations, thinking mechanisms and action dynamism, also belongs to the essence of true poverty. Prayer as a purging of the spirit, as a process of deep purification and as a means of greater inner transformation is part and parcel of this freedom. Prayer, and only prayer, makes us really poor, bereft of our own inner instincts of possessiveness.

With this freedom we can create a new world. A new paradise will be built on earth once again. Freed from all desires and cravings, our eyes set only on God, the most beloved of the soul, we, liberated from the clutches of the flesh, move around freely in the world of matter. This does not mean that we are up in the clouds or speak a super human language. What really happens is just the contrary. We become the simplest among the simple ones, filled with joy and peace. There is nothing hampering the free flow of our being in all directions, to God, to humankind and to all creation. In all we see the indwelling presence of God. "God is all in all" we sing and so love everything from the depth of our heart, embracing everything, yet transcending everything with a spontaneous

freedom. Poverty is this transcendental freedom, spontaneous and natural in virtue of our orientation to God on whom our minds are permanently fixed.

You have been raised to life with Christ, so set your hearts on the things that are in heaven, where Christ sits on his throne at the right-hand side of God. Keep your minds fixed on things there, not on things here on earth (Col. 3:1-2).



## Relish Relinquishing

*This world is the Lord's abode  
He dwells in all, great and small alike.  
Relish them all, ever relinquishing  
Remain attentive, yet unattached.*

*Love everyone, every creature  
Keep them all, dear to your heart,  
Yet leave them all, rising above,  
That all be free and leave you free.*

*Freedom is what all desire,  
Yet desire is what destroys freedom.  
Cravings made our world a war-field,  
Giving makes it again worth living.*

*Bereft of desire, be a friend to all,  
Joy will you spread, peace will you reap.  
Desire nothing and possess everything,  
Relish them all, ever relinquishing.*

## Chapter II

# PRAYER AND POWER

**"You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you" (Acts 1:8).**

Saul was a young Pharisee, proud of his prestigious position in the society. He was also aware of the power invested in Pharisees, the elite of the then Jewish community. He was not a commoner. He was special, well educated, accepted and acknowledged. He was really proud of this privileged state, which he deemed great.

But to his annoyance and uncomfortable self-assertion there was an emerging group of poor people in Jerusalem, uneducated, uncouth countrymen and women, heralding the dawn of a new consciousness. They were really poor and powerless; yet their number was steadily increasing. It was a nuisance, and more than that, a nonsense. Some of the Pharisees looked at this new movement with fear and anxiety: a menace, though meaningless, they thought. They

whispered: "Is the power centre of the society changing? Though worthless creatures, a huge multitude of them can still become a problem. Quantity can be powerful." The pharaohs of Egypt had been afraid of this same potential power, dormant in the ever-increasing number of Israelites. But Saul did not think in that line. He looked at Christians as the marginalized who had no right to exist in the Jewish society, the chosen people of God. He was not afraid of them nor their imminent power. They could be brushed aside by a single act of law, a simple sanction, a legal authorization to exterminate this unwanted people, to wipe them off the face of the earth. It was with this legal sanction and cruel mind that he set out for Damascus. Yes, he had the power to exist, but also to exterminate those whom he judged to be without right of existence. Considering himself a great man of power and might, fast he marched towards Damascus.

On the way the power of the Lord descended from heaven, struck him down to the earth, blinded his eyes and baffled his mind. Within an instant he lost all his power. Powerless and helpless, afraid and abandoned, Saul made a sigh from the depth of his heart: "Who are you, Lord?" The answer was all the more astounding: "I am Jesus whom you persecute" (Acts 9:5). Yes, I am the powerless one,

the one whom you consider 'the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world.' I represent those powerless ones whom you want to do away with from the face of the earth.

Power and prestige had walked hand in hand with Saul. But what kind of power is this? Is the outcast more important than the élite? Do they have such enormous power? The power and the self-sufficiency which the élite, the Pharisees, had enjoyed so far, were beginning to fade, throwing Saul into utter darkness and total confusion. He was literally blind. Journeying in darkness he groped his way to a destination, determined not by him, but by the voice from heaven, the voice of the powerless. This journey through utter powerlessness, through stunning awareness of one's own weakness and littleness, opened his inner eye and Saul was illumined. There emerged from the old Saul a new man called Paul, empowered by God. Paul's philosophy of power underwent a total transformation; power is from God, power is God. All other powers are of no use and incapable of facing the sudden descent of this power. Those who are in touch with this power, the power of the Spirit, are truly powerful. With the Lord, the powerless are powerful. Emptied of ego, elite-consciousness and a superiority complex, there is ample room in them for the indwelling of the Divine Power. The

powerless are God's own and God's power is theirs. What is the nature of this power? How does one acquire this power? Is it through prayer? Or is it a gift of God to his chosen ones?

And so those whom God set apart, he called; and those he called, he put right with himself, and he shared his glory with them (Rom. 8:30).

One thing is certain, only those who are in union with God can enjoy this power and glory. It is God's gift. Whatever the way one is open to God, is in touch with God, becomes a form of prayer and so the power of God can enter and abide within.

There is a power that the world offers. It has all the characteristics of the world's own nature. The lowest form of this power is muscle power, the power of brutal force. The Army and weapons are only an extension of this power. What we call "super power", the power of a nation, which has the most lethal and diabolic weapons in the world, is the world's basest form of this power. Whilst very rich nations have such enlarged forms of muscle power, made up of enormous quantity of weaponry, the poorer nations have man-power, due to the enormous numbers of people living in their countries. This mass is what the Pharaohs were afraid of, and of which, today, all the rich nations with diminished populations are well aware. The

world can also offer a kind of mind power, the power of inventions, patents, bringing a seeming intellectual control of the world. Of course, the power of money is intimately related to all of these. The worldly characteristics of such powers are clearly proclaimed by their instability and ultimate unreliability.

Religion, though it stands for and embodies the power of the Spirit, is often sidetracked by the political tug of war of the World's power games. Saul was zealous and religious. He was the follower of the religion of the élite. He marched to Damascus with pride in his mind and might in his hands. But neither pride nor might could face the challenge of the silent power from heaven. The origin and the operational dynamics of the power of the Spirit are entirely different. The Spirit does not depend on anything material; and operates totally in the other way. Later, Paul himself gives a glimpse of this power in his letter to the Corinthians.

Do you already have everything you need? Are you already rich? Have you become kings, even though we are not? Well, I wish you really were kings, so that we could be kings together with you. For, it seems to me, that God has given the very last place to us apostles, like men condemned to die in public as a spectacle for the whole world of angels and of mankind. For Christ's sake we

are fools; but you are wise in union with Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! We are despised, but you are honoured! To this very moment we go hungry and thirsty; we are clothed in rags; we are beaten; we wander from place to place; we wear ourselves out with hard work... We are no more than this world's refuse; we are the scum of the earth to this very moment (I Cor. 4:8-13).

After making a clear reference to the power of wealth, status and privileges, Paul describes the situation of the apostles who are now seen as the scum of the earth. They are ignored, abandoned and even persecuted. They have no right to exist. Just as Saul had viewed the Christians in Damascus, so too the Apostles were seen in the eyes of the world - powerless because they had opted for Christ. Yet Paul, the new Saul, turns this worldly understanding of power upside down, declaring that there is a new power at work with the apostles... a power received from Christ; a power with the face of the Spirit. So he writes:

When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure; when we are insulted, we answer with kind words (I Cor. 4:12-13).

This declaration points to a tremendous change in Paul. Saul, who had kept the cloaks of those zealous Jews who stoned Stephen to death, now proclaims

that he could bless those who persecute him. He has been empowered by the Spirit of Christ. Therefore, he now responds as Christ his master did, who prayed for his murderers. He, who had watched the martyrdom of Stephan with anger and aggression, now remembers how Stephen had prayed for those who persecuted him and so imitates him. He too has the power to forgive, to love and to lay down his life for the other, whether friend or foe. Here is a different power at work: the power of the Spirit; the power, which brings back the lost rhythm of paradise; the power of the powerless.

This power pours forth from the depth of one's own awareness, which is now the awareness of Christ. Prayer and meditation have formed this awareness. You become what you meditate. When you meditate Christ, the Spirit of Christ makes you another Christ. You do as Christ did. This is the power of the Spirit of Christ abiding in you.

### **Prayer and the Power of Awareness within**

The Spirit is an abiding awareness within us. It is not a thing. It is a presence, a powerful presence. Christians consider this abiding Spirit as a person, meaning that it has its own subsistence and is endowed with consciousness. It is this divine



consciousness that characterizes us in prayer. Slowly our consciousness, blurred with the awareness of the mind, sense and the world, becomes more and more purified and charged with the consciousness of the Spirit. The Spirit penetrates the inner depths of our soul, purges it with its life giving waters, enlightens it with its eternal light and empowers it with its divine power. This is what happens during prayer. Prayer is always an expression of our surrender to this Spirit. We dispose ourselves for the working of the Spirit and remain available to Him always. Prayer awakens into a deep awareness of the Spirit that abides and transforms. And it is we who are transformed into his likeness. Holiness is the fact of change within us: change in disposition, change in attitude and ultimately change in form. This transformation of the soul, of our consciousness, and its operative dynamism is what we call grace, the habitual or the actual.

Instead of a theology of grace, as developed in the West, the Christian East spoke about a theology of the Spirit, more accurately, a Pneumatology. They believed that the Spirit abides in all of us as 'uncreated energy', from which all our actions should proceed. Energy and power are within us. We are not aware of it and so we seek power outside of ourselves. Even religious leaders seek power

from without. Power and control is what people crave for, unaware of the power that is within. Ignorant to the presence of the Spirit within us, naturally we are tempted to seek power and pleasure outside. Hence, the awakening of the Spirit needs to take place in each one of us so that we too may be in touch with this enormous source of power within. The awakening of the Spirit does not mean that a sleeping Spirit is awakened. Rather it means that the presence of the Spirit is brought to our dormant consciousness. We become aware of the Spirit within us and allow the power of the Spirit to flow from within.

### ***Tapas* and the Power of the Spirit**

The Sanskrit word *tapas* means the 'inner ardour', 'the fire within' which leads the seeker to a spiritual awakening. The newly awakened conscience disciplines and controls the life of the seeker. *Tapas* now becomes self-control and self-discipline. It later becomes spiritual power to abandon everything else which is not God, and the determination to follow the 'narrow path' to reach the highest union with God.

The Spirit is within us but we are not aware of His presence. *Tapas* is the *sadhana*, the way, which leads us to the Spirit. *Tapas* is understood here as

our determination to enter into our own depth. Determination is followed up by a disciplined way of life. We are not in touch with the Spirit because our senses wander after sense objects and our mind delightfully follows the senses. We tend to live our lives filled with an awareness made up of all that we have received from the world outside of ourselves. The famous theologian, St. Thomas Aquinas said: "there is nothing in the mind that is not previously in the senses." This means that whatever we have in our mind is what has been distilled from the sense-data through a process of abstraction. The awareness in the mind which people call knowledge is, therefore, not necessarily of the Spirit within us, but far more is of the world and of all that it gives. Of course, we do have ideas in our mind, and these ideas are the net result of the process of knowledge, drawn from the world. This is why mental awareness, though good and needed, is not the depth of human wisdom. Deep down in our consciousness there is a different kind of awareness, the awareness of the Spirit, to which our mind is so often closed. This is why an awakening of the Spirit becomes necessary for all of us, so that our lives might become a journey into this hidden awareness. Thus the mind gets enlightened by the light from within and not through the sense data coming from outside.

St. Paul in his letter to Romans gives us a clue to this awareness from within. He says:

For the Spirit that God has given you does not make you slaves and cause you to be afraid; instead, the Spirit makes you God's children, and by the Spirit's power we cry out to God, 'Father! My Father!' God's Spirit joins himself to our spirit to declare that we are God's children (Rom. 8:15-16).

Here Paul is speaking about two levels of consciousness, the divine and the human. The human consciousness is often enriched by the knowledge from outside. But it has its own limitations and needs to be illumined by the divine consciousness. This divine consciousness, which is God's own abiding Spirit within us, should flow into our human consciousness and enlighten us. This process is known as awakening. In fact, it is our dormant mind, out of touch with the Divine, that is really awakened. In common parlance people call it: 'the awakening of the Spirit'.

*Tapas* is an indispensable means for this awakening of the Spirit. Though the light of the Spirit is always a free gift, the control of the senses, concentration of the mind and discipline of the whole life are always regarded as ways that lead

us to the deeper experience of the Spirit. *Katha Upanishad* says:

As oil in sesame seed, as butter in cream, as water in hidden springs, as fire in fire sticks, so is the *atman* grasped in one's own self when one searches for him in truth and with fervour.<sup>6</sup>

Once we attain the Spirit the power of the Spirit becomes our power. All humans are endowed with this Divine Spirit, but often we are not aware of it nor do we care for it. We are very much craving after the power of the world. Therefore, we really and miserably miss the enormous source of power that is within us. Only *tapas*, a disciplined way of life, can lead us to this power. *Tapas* is like an electric plug. Whilst power is stored on the power line it is not available to us, unless we plug in and come in touch with it. Once we are in touch with it we can channel it the way we like and direct it to the goal we have, e.g., to light a lamp or switch on a fan or for any other purpose. In the same way the Divine power that is within us has to be touched, channelled and directed. *Tapas*, as determination, concentration and meditation, touches this power and, through disciplined and self-controlled activities, channels and directs it. The world becomes enriched through the flow of the divine power. Prayer as meditation, concentration and self-surrender are various forms of *tapas* bringing

divine power to the world and making it more and more available to all human beings.

This does not mean that divine power is just a result of human endeavour. No amount of human endeavour, however sublime it is, can produce divine power. The divine power flows only from the divine Spirit. But it flows only through a well-disposed human mind. Disposing one's mind and being to the working of the Spirit is a needed human endeavour. Even for this endeavour we, humans, weak and powerless as we are, depend on divine power or grace. But this power is within us as God abides within us. All we can do is to enable the flow of this divine power. Prayer in all its forms can channel this power within us and make it available for all around us.

## Let your Power Descend on Me

*Subtler than the subtle, greater than the great,  
The silent Word descended from heaven,  
As Mary prayed in enraptured silence.*

*The message was dear and dreadful:  
The Word eternal will become flesh,  
Making Mary's womb his chosen home  
And will live in time, in the valley of tears.*

*Mary stood spellbound, her eyes closed,  
Reason silenced in bewilderment.  
And Mary heard the divine word:  
"The Power of God will come upon you."  
Power descended upon a virgin girl  
And Mary became the mother of God.*

*Your power O Lord, is your Spirit  
Descend upon your weaklings  
Dispel our darkness, enlighten us  
Destroy our weakness, empower us*

*May this power of yours touch my depth,  
Enflame my heart, enliven my faith,  
And may she guide my faltering steps.*

### Chapter III

## **PRAYER AS POWER TO RE-CENTER OUR LIFE IN GOD**

**"In him was life and life became the light of  
mankind" (Jn.1: 4)**

Let us look meditatively at life in the universe. For a moment think of the universe without life. How still and sterile it would be. Life makes the universe vibrant and charming. Focus your attention on all the forms of life you can see or imagine. The world is especially blessed with the presence of plants, trees, and green vegetation. Living creatures, small and great alike fill the earth. We see birds flying over the lakes and mountains of this vast universe; we see shoals of fish making their way through the waters of the sea. Life has penetrated everywhere, even the remotest heights and farthest depths.

The psalmist sees the world as blessed with life:



Lord, you have made so many things!  
How wisely you made them all!  
The earth is filled with your creatures...  
All of them depend on you  
To give them food when they need it...  
When you turn away, they are afraid;  
When you take away your breath, they die  
And go back to the dust from which they came.  
But when you give them breath, they are created;  
You give new life to the earth  
(Ps. 104: 24,27,29 & 30).

God designed human life as the crown of creation, in which all forms of life were called to participate. The human being is a wonderful work of God, a synthesis of all forms of life, a mini-universe. That is why the ancient people called 'man' a microcosm. Every human being contains the cosmos in a small way.

What has happened to this human life? Why is life so miserable today, at least for many, if not for all? This leads us to the story of how life was cut off from its centre and source. "In him was life and life became the light of mankind" (Jn.1: 4). We read in the Gospel that life had only one source and that was in Him who was in the beginning. He is the Word, the Logos, the subsisting divine consciousness. All life proceeds from Him, all life is sustained by him and with its inherent tendency

strives from within to return to Him. But once the rhythm of the universe was distorted, the knife of distortion plunged deep into the heart of human life. In fact, what really happened is the other way about. It is the distortion in the human life that destroyed the rhythm of the universe. This distortion came from within, from the human consciousness, and so from the highest form of life on earth.

"In him was life and the life became light of mankind" (Jn.1:4). Human life is qualitatively different from other forms of life, because in *humans*, the divine life becomes their inner light. *Birds and animals*, flies and fishes, however lovely *they are*, do not enjoy this blessing. Nor do they face the challenge of the Ego, rising up from within their own selves. Hence, left to themselves, these creatures keep the rhythm of this universe. The hymn of the universe was disrupted; the rhythm of the global dance was broken, only when human consciousness, the highest form of life, asserted itself over against its own source and centre.

When the Word designed life on earth, He designed it with different stages of life, starting with vegetation, and finishing with the highest level of consciousness, participation in the very life of God. *Sharing* this consciousness with humankind, and

so placing such a high degree of self-awareness within created matter, was at the same time a risk and a gift. It is the greatest gift humanity has received, a call to participate in the very life of God. But at the same time by this marvellous gift humankind was singled out from the rest of the universe.

Consciousness is life *par excellence*. It is the very life of God. It is this gift of self-awareness, which constitutes a human being and therefore renders them responsible for their actions. They are held responsible, because by virtue of consciousness they can see themselves as if in a mirror. Reflective consciousness makes us responsible for what we do, because we do it with freedom. Freedom is the gift of consciousness, the gift of self-awareness with which God has blessed human kind. Though violated by us through sin, the power of consciousness is still at work in all of us. This is especially so since the emergence of Christ, who has set us free from the clutches of sin. Jesus presented before us the Way. As the Divine Word who became flesh, Jesus is the unique embodiment of divine consciousness. Jesus shows us the way to express divine consciousness in human flesh. He is a great exemplar and ideal for all of us. Our body, senses and mind, our human flesh, must remain integrated in the deeper awareness of the soul; and

within the soul the Word abides. "Abide in me and I will abide in you" (Jn. 15:4), says the Lord. However, the possibility is still there that we can ignore this divine consciousness within us. We can receive or reject this precious gift. With the gift of freedom which the Word has bestowed upon us, we can assert our own selves over and against the Word who designed us and who is now the ultimate Self within us. This Divine Word, seen within us, must be welcomed with love and be reflected without blemish in all our actions. It is the pride and privilege of humankind to acknowledge this source and live by it. Christ makes us free, and freedom places us on the platform of self-decision. If we consciously choose the divine Centre that is within us, we live. If, on the contrary, we consciously choose to move from this Centre, we die. "I am the Vine, you are the branches...without me you can do nothing" (Jn. 15:5).

The Vine is the centre, the ultimate Self. Jesus Christ, who is the Word made flesh, is this Vine. The branch too reflects the Word, in its native likeness to Jesus Christ. In other words, all of us are conceived in Christ (Col. 1:15) and are destined to be like Christ. Think of the ancient Christian dictum: "every Christian is another Christ" (*Alter Christus*). The life of the supreme Christ flows from the vine to the branches and the branches are

empowered, and enlightened. "In Him was life, and the life became light of mankind" (Jn. 1:4). The reality of Christ as Vine and Centre is the actual inner core of humankind.

The self-assertion of human consciousness over against the divine consciousness that is within us, is what we call sin. It distorts the rhythm of our life, and, consequently, the total rhythm of the universe. Once the rhythm is lost, suffering begins. What is suffering if not the awareness of disorder? Human beings cannot do away with their awareness. Consciousness, once given by God, is always with us. In pain and pleasure consciousness is with us. In suffering and satisfaction consciousness is with us.

We cannot run away from our consciousness. But we are not condemned to live in an unhappy consciousness. Christian saints have faced suffering with a smiling face. For this, they have drawn inspiration from Jesus Christ, their Master. Jesus has not eradicated suffering from our lives. But by overcoming death by his resurrection he has empowered us with hope and promise of life beyond all the powers of darkness and distortion. By His own death on the Cross, Jesus made suffering an acceptable way to restore the lost rhythm of the universe.

Perhaps Buddha had a valid point when he said *sarvam dukkham*: Everything is suffering. In this world of lost rhythm, in this state of 'paradise lost' there is nothing reliable. Everything is impermanent and non-steady, leading us to suffering after suffering. Life has become suffering: suffering is nothing but awareness of disorder. The de-centering of life from its source and centre has brought us to this state.

The threat of suffering, sickness and death brings about anxiety in the inner centre of our being. Anxiety threatens us by presenting before us the possible annihilation of all our ambitions and achievements. Hence some philosophers define anxiety as the threat of non-being, i.e., the threat against the realization of our future possibilities. Suffering as anxiety pervades also our future. Anxiety is all pervading. Unless guided back to the centre by a re-centering process, the human is very likely to fall into the abyss of despair, a lifelong state of hopelessness.

Prayer is here for our assistance. Prayer can bring us back to the centre. Prayer will re-centre our life on its real centre. Prayer will re-centre whom was life and from whom life proceeded. If anxiety is the threat of non-being, prayer leads us to Being, the source of all life. Hence, prayer gives

us courage to be. The human life, endowed with divine consciousness, is ultimately beyond all threat. "Fear not I am with you," says the Lord. One thing we need to be concerned about is to be with Being and not with non-being, to be with the Lord and not with the forces of destruction. This means that we have to choose God consciously, with full human awareness; to choose that Absolute Being which alone is beyond all threat of non-being. This is the function of prayer, whichever way we practice it. Instead, if we have chosen creatures, beings characterized by non-being, as our ultimate concern, we are bound to end up in anxiety and despair, because these creatures with their self-centered emptiness (non-being), will leave us in total and brutal loneliness. Such anxiety should not threaten a praying person, because everyday, every moment, this person remembers that his/her life is in God, and keeps on integrating his/her life into God by prayer, meditation and action.

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## May I Discover You within Me

*Split between the forces wide apart  
Held in void, unable to start,  
I find myself a miserable creature  
Un-centered from my own self  
With an empty inner core*

*Why Lord, must life be so hard  
For us, the bearers of your image pure?  
Why Lord, is peace so far  
Needed though, for our daily cure?*

*Groping in darkness, I cry to you, O Lord,  
"Open my inner eye that I may see  
The mansions of myself I have built  
Give me light to discover you  
Within my heart, wherein you dwell,  
As abiding peace and blissful splendour."*

## **Chapter IV**

# **PRAYER AS COSMIC INTEGRATION**

**"All things were made through him, and  
without him was anything made  
that was made" (Jn. 1:3).**

**"...Yet the world knew him not" (Jn. 1:10b).**

We have already seen that prayer is a fascination for every human mind. Aware or unaware, humans have a constant tendency to pray, because they are finite and overcoming finitude is an inherent need for all. In this chapter we see how prayer becomes cosmic and through prayer the cosmos is integrated into one's own interior self.

Let us start with a simple exercise. Sit relaxed watching the vast universe in front of you. If you have a terrace roof on your house, sit on your terrace in the early or later hours of the day and watch the universe: the horizon, the trees, the waters, the plants, the flowers, the birds, etc. (If you are not in

a position to watch, please imagine.) See how beautiful this universe is. God in his loving kindness has prepared all these for you. See how the trees give you oxygen and you nourish them with carbon dioxide. God has set a beautiful rhythm and order. Try to have an experiential look into the rhythmic flow of harmony in the universe. Remain in silence for a few minutes.

### **Cosmos as Beautiful and Sublime**

This wonderful cosmos, with its marvelous rhythm of life is a creation of divine integrity. Great is the God who has created it. The psalmist had a view of this universe and there comes from his heart this prayer: "Great you are." Yes, indeed, the Lord is great. His intelligence is original and his love is creative. The result is that you have a universe of unending splendour and beauty, ever blossoming with the freshness of life. As a human being you occupy only a very little space in this vast universe. You are only a tiny speck and that too will be wiped out after a few years.

What is man or woman that the almighty should think of them? They are like reeds, blades of grass. They exist today. They vanish tomorrow. Even the place they occupied will not be noticed any more. The humans are creatures so absolutely

contingent, non-necessary, yet called to contain the entire universe within them.

Placed in the universe, we spontaneously develop a rapport with it. Everything in this world becomes part of our being. Through our body we slowly build up a world-body. Embodied and "en-worlded" as we are, this universe becomes our larger self.

Here there is a nebulous reflection of what happens in Christ. For, when the Word became flesh, the Word adorned this fleshy body with a beautiful universe. Thus a world-body was formed around the body of Christ which was totally and hypostatically centered on the Word.

Similarly, participating in the self-same human nature, each one of us, is an embodied consciousness (self or soul) placed in this world. Relating ourselves with the world, we too develop our world-body. We have to experience this and this very experience can lead us into prayer. In other words, a prayerful look at this world will make it a better world to live in.

Once again watch the vast universe. See its beauty. How many marvels does this universe offer to you! See the sun rising up in the eastern horizon. How he dispels darkness, and sends his royal rays

of light all around. How he stirs to life all living creatures. How this same sun gives us warmth and strength. If we meditate the sun in silence and solitude, the sun will lead us to the hidden mystery of that invisible Sun who illumines all human hearts from within. Watch the sun and relish its beauty leading to mystery.

This meditative look at the universe is not restricted to the sun alone. Any creature of God can be made the object of our meditative look. And once we begin to delve deep, it will lead us to the unfathomable mystery of God being revealed to us through it. To rise from meaning to mystery is mysticism. The human mind is by nature both rational and mystical. It is true that often we stop at the rational realm of our mind. Rationalism does not promise us salvation. We are called to make use of our reason for going beyond reason. God is ultimately attained not in reason but in faith. A philosophical faith is the right preparation for a theological faith which is the foster ground for relishing the higher mysteries revealed by God.

Mystery makes the beautiful more sublime. The beautiful, when it communicates the ineffable which is beyond reason and expression, turns out to be the sublime, leaving our tongue and mind in

utter silence. Astonishment alone remains. Wonder survives and turns out to be everlasting.

What is the meaning of this everlasting wonder? Is it not the vague glimpse of the invisible Beauty, now made available through the visible? To see the invisible in the visible is real wisdom, real prayer as well. The universe is the visible and the Word, through whom everything was made, is the invisible. Hence in a prayerful look at the world, we see:

The Invisible in the visible,  
The Eternal in the temporal,  
The Infinite in the finite.

When we do this the purpose of creation is achieved. Creation groans to be re-united with the source from which it came forth (Rom. 8:19-21). In the beginning, when the universe was originally brought to existence, it danced in prayerful rhythm. There was music every where. There was rhythm in every human step. This was paradise. Only when sin, the assertion of the ego over the Divine rhythm, disrupted the harmony of the universe, did the dancing rhythm of the paradise stop. Sin was a great distortion, a separation, an unhappy break in the heart of the universe which was human consciousness.

## **Meditation, the Means for Re-integrating the Universe**

Meditation re-centers the universe back into its divine rhythm. This re-centering happens through us, through you and me, through our prayer. Prayer is not just uttering well-worded prayers. Genuine prayer arises from the deep experience of the Divine abiding in the universe, and above all in one's own heart. The sacrificial offering of the cosmos through meditation is the time-honoured way of practicing prayer. Seeing the Eternal Word in all of creation, is one form of prayer. But mere seeing does not save the world. What is seen must be realized. The Word should really become the centre of the world. Here action becomes sacrificial offering (*yajna*). Through such action we liberate creation from its slavery. Creation is enslaved by our proud and selfish ego. We have created a sinful, ego-centered world, with unjust power structures which are self-perpetuating. We have violated the rhythm of paradise; denied human rights; distorted the ecological balance; desecrated our Mother Earth; all because, in our great eagerness to boost our ego, we have dared to ignore the sacredness of the Divine in the universe. The primitive man or woman can better teach us in this regard. Even today we refuse every contemporary prophet who speaks out against this ego-centered world. God



sends us secular and religious prophets. Both condemn this distorted world which we have created for our own self-satisfaction.

But if we want a peaceful world, a just world, a better world, we have no alternative, but to re-centre the world in the Divine. A wheel cannot have many centers. There is only one centre: the hub, around which the spokes are gathered. So that the wheel may roll gently and smoothly all the spokes must be centered on the hub. No spoke can create a centre around itself. This will break the total rhythm of the wheel and make the rolling of the wheel quite miserable, not only for that particular spoke, but for all of them, and for the whole wheel. Similarly, the universe has its centre in God, in the Logos, by whom and in whom everything is created. It is the proud and self-centered ego, which has diverted the centre of the universe to itself. It has yearned to create an ego-centered world.

Such ego-centered worlds, when created, become a threat to one another. With an enormous amassment of lethal weapons and armoury, each of these self-centered worlds defends itself, makes itself the centre and leaves the whole world in total misery and dreadful anxiety. In order to deliver the world from this predicament, there must be the destruction of the ego, the annihilation of ego-

centered worlds, and the turning back of each human individual to God. This means that we have to re-centre the world on the Eternal Word who designed it and brought it into existence. Prayer, whether meditation or sacrificial offering, is expected to achieve this great goal and ideal. The meditative *yogis* do it by constantly seeking the Invisible in the visible, and thus keeping the world as God's own rather than their own. The change of heart that takes place in them slowly leaves them forever free from all egoistic attachment to this world and worldly things. Everything they have is at the disposal of everyone. Their world is recentered on God and thus becomes a model of the new world that is emerging around them. The ascetic activists re-center the world through their actions of breaking down and building up. Just as the meditative *yogis* have to translate their vision into action, so too, the ascetic activists have to see the Divine reflected everywhere, distortion of which they want now to rectify. Meditation and action thus go hand in hand. None of us can rightly give up either of them. Yet one may be more inclined to meditation and another for action. But for the great process of cosmic re-integration and re-centering they must both work together, complementing each other. If we really touch God in our prayer, this will be expressed in action as

love to our neighbours. Neighbours are the persons next to us, wherever we are.

The leader or a politician in India who breaks a coconut in front of a temple, indirectly says that he/she is prepared to break his/her ego-centered world. Rituals are ways to symbolize the re-centering process. The Christian priest who brings elements of bread and wine, gifts of creation to the altar, in order that they be converted into the body and blood of Christ, publicly proclaims his desire to make his world more and more God centered. But, unfortunately, all rituals can become empty symbols, when there is no meditative and dedicated mind modifying and enriching them. The ritual should express the actual mind of the offerer and for this, the mind should remain focussed on the centre, on God from whom everything proceeds and into whom everything must be re-integrated. The activist in each one of us is the completing link of this integrating process. Hence, the contemplative turns to the activist and the activist turns to the contemplative. They are both in each one of us but in different degrees of realization. Hence, some are prone to be more contemplative and their realms of action restricted to research and selfless actions in everyday life. But some others are more active, and so with the contemplative ardour they acquire through prayer, they enter into

the arena of more demanding action, involving even physical confrontation. In this context the contemplative should support the activist and the activist should feel at home with the contemplative. Both are trying to re-center the universe in its divine centre.

Once the re-centering is done, we will have a better world to live in, a world of cosmic harmony and peace, a world of divine rhythm and joy.

## Called to Cosmic Integration

*Before the cosmos blossomed  
in spotless splendour  
And the earth was not yet formed,  
I remembered you as my beauty on earth.  
I thought of plants and planets  
Birds and animals, all for you  
And I made them all just for you.  
I shaped you, then as a marvellous blend of all.*

*Then I placed my own Spirit  
In the cave of your heart,  
That the life on earth be centered on  
And led by my light, the light divine.*

*Thus, you came on earth, a vessel of my glory,  
Filled with my life, lulled by my love.  
You are great and precious in my eyes,  
The chosen vessel where my awareness dwells.*

*Let creation return to me,  
Through your prayer  
And through you  
Let my blessings fall on all;  
Let the cosmos dance around you,  
To the dancing rhythm of paradise.  
Let you be centered on me.  
And I will abide in you.*

## Chapter V

# PRAYER AND PEACE

**Peace is what I leave with you; it is my own peace that I give you. I do not give it as the world does. Do not be worried and upset; do not be afraid (Jn. 14:27).**

The real and abiding peace should come from within and not from without, from the world. What comes from the world will change as the world changes. The world is not simply the sum total of things or beings before us. The world is made anew everyday by human beings. Good people can make a good world; bad people can make a bad world. We cannot depend on the world for our peace, because the shaping of the human world in which we live depends on the mind of the people we live with.

If we are lucky and fortunate we can live in a well ordered world, where there is rhythm and harmony and as a result also peace. But this can be disturbed over night. A revolution, a military coup,

a war situation changes the atmosphere of our world rapidly. These radical changes affect also the attitude of the people. Friends become enemies all of a sudden, because leaders have grouped them into opposing camps. We can have a different world over night. The world is largely determined by the mind of the people and we have no guarantee that the mind of all people will always be set aright. Hence, violent worlds, warring worlds, aggressive and attacking worlds arise. Many of us have experienced these facts in our own lives.

Imagine a situation: members of two religions, say Hindus and Christians, live in perfect cordiality in a village. But one day, a crazy zealot of religion attacks a temple or a church in a different part of our country. As the news breaks out the members of that religion whose place of worship was attacked, are up in arms against the aggressor and his community. A special animosity colours and characterizes our consciousness. It becomes a fight of self defence, God's defence, self-identity, and personal rights, etc. We are also pulled to identify ourselves with our group. Our peace is threatened.

How can we be in peace in spite of such incidents which are inevitable, if we are real about our human life? Our peace must have a different type of source. Our peace should come from within

our own selves. This is what Jesus is promising when he said: "Peace is what I leave with you. It is my own peace that I give you" (Jn. 14:27a). This divine peace is within us, just as the Lord of peace abides in our hearts. "Do not be worried and upset; do not be afraid" (Jn. 14:27b). If the source of peace is in the world, our peace is left to the mercy of the world; but if our peace has its foundation in the Lord, it will abide forever. The peace which Jesus promises us has its origin in the Lord himself who abides within us. "Abide in me and I abide in you" (Jn. 15:5).

For this purpose the Lord promised to send his Spirit to us. After the resurrection, when he breathed his Spirit into his disciples, he again coupled the giving of his Spirit with the giving of peace: "Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I send you. Then he breathed on them and said 'receive the Holy Spirit'" (Jn. 20:21-22). Jesus who promised his peace to us is now abiding within us through his Spirit. This Spirit is the Spirit of peace, the one who empowers and enlightens us and dispels the clouds of darkness and the threats of worries and anxieties from within us. As light and delight He dwells within us and becomes the source of our everlasting peace.



## **Prayer, the Golden Path to the Source of Peace**

For a moment let us imagine that we are on the bank of a roaring ocean. You see how the waves rise up and roll on to the shore. It makes a lot of noise. It brings also particles of what the sea contains to the shore. The waves also wash the seashore again and again, shaking and sucking a lot of sand back to the sea. The water and the seashore, as we see them, are in a constant state of change. Not a single moment of serenity is there. One wave is followed by another and it goes on and on without end.

Now let us imagine that we make a dive and reach the depths of the same sea. What do we see and experience there? There is not a single wave rising up and rolling back. The ocean in its depths is quite calm and profoundly peaceful. Unruffled serenity reigns there. The depths are peaceful.

In fact, the sea we are watching is only a picture of our own selves. We too have an outer layer of wavy waters, very easily moved by the wind of desires, or sometimes violently set in motion by the tempests of uncontrolled passions. Such waves of passions can wield great destructive power, just as violent sea waves can be enormously destructive. But we also have an inner depth, just as the ocean

has, which is ever serene and peaceful. It is in this inner depth that Divinity abides, or it could better be said that this unfathomable depth of our own selves is really the Divine Spirit who is present there as our foundation and the source of all what we are. This ultimate source and substratum is ever serene, though always acting in his pure way sustaining us and guiding us to our destiny. We do not have any other source of peace. God is our peace. Undisturbed peace can flow only from this divine source. Therefore, Jesus said to us: "It is my own peace that I give to you; I do not give it as the world does. Do not be worried and upset" (Jn. 14:27a).

It is by prayer, by meditation that we come in touch with this source of peace. True and deep meditation is really a diving into the inner depth. There we come in touch with the eternal serenity which is the ultimate seat of rhythm and harmony and from which all our actions arise.

However, human as we are, we are not often aware of this abiding Spirit within us. We are rather concerned about "where our food will come from, where our clothes come from, etc" (Mt. 6:31). Of course, these too pertain to our real being. We need food, not food for our mouth, but also food for our ears, which is sound; food for our eyes which is

colour and light; food for our nose which is smell; and food for our skin which is touch. This 'food layer' which surrounds us and pervades our being, is what we are often aware of. There is nothing wrong in this. But the Lord says that by worrying over these needs we cannot settle them, nor realistically handle their problems. On the contrary, these concerns disturb our peace and leave us to live in continual distraction, anxiety and fear. We try to seek peace by settling these problems one by one. What really happens is that new and new problems pop up. There is no rest, as all these problems are without end or permanent solution. This shows us that we should not depend on things outside for our real and lasting peace. The world which provides food for all our senses, changes and as it changes it reveals new promises and threats. It never promises lasting peace, nor steadfastness in what it brings to us or takes away from us. Hence, the real peace is not to be sought outside, in the fast changing world.

Our peace should come from within. There alone the Lord of peace abides ready to open the source of eternal peace to each one of us, provided we are ready to receive it. Peace is within. Peace depends on our ability to rest on the real foundation of our own being. Once this is settled, the Lord says, the other needs will be satisfied. We have to

subordinate our earthly concerns and should not allow them to consume us entirely. We are far more important, and already contain greater wealth than that which we seek from outside.

A usual objection raised to this way of seeking peace is the reality of the hunger of the poorest of the poor. How can they seek peace in their inner depth when they are really and literally hungry? Hunger is certainly a reality to be reckoned with. However, any amount of worry over hunger is not a solution for the problem of hunger itself. To regain the lost rhythm and harmony of human life, by which everyone will live a decent and dignified life, befitting to that of the children of God, is a right of everyone. Our earnest endeavour to establish this fundamental human right should not stand in the way of our peace. It is with peace, keeping in touch with our own interior centre, and for peace, by promising a dignified life for all, that we fulfill these obligations. But this is not what is really happening in this world. Our enlarged ego craves after unlimited possessions, pleasures and positions. And so our life becomes more and more miserable. We do not live in touch with ourselves, but lead a disconnected and fragmented life, drifting along with the current of flowing desires. Our television advertisements are such that they make us feel that our greed is real need. Life

becomes shallow and completely divorced from that sacred 'shalom', the peace of heart, which each person deeply, though unconsciously, longs for.

From our bodily layer let us now move to the mind. The mind is in search of knowledge and seeks it from without and not from within. In our ordinary human mind there is no knowledge that is not derived from the world through the senses. Senses, receiving their appropriate food from the world, present a pleasant plate of food (sense-data) for the mind to feed on. Mind with its peculiar power assimilates into itself the inner content of each of these sense-data (by a process philosophers call "abstraction") and forms concepts about things outside. These concepts are a wonderful creation and represent the outer world; a world which can be given many different faces as a result of the novel combinations of these same concepts. We have a fond world of ideas within us with which we play, we build up and we philosophize. But once again this mental process has no end. It will go on and on. Our aspired peace is not a result of this mental process. It can at the most give us a moment of mental satisfaction, when we see that the logic of our mind is temporarily satisfied. But human life is not simply pure logic. It has several dimensions surpassing logic. It is called to penetrate into the mysteries of life, and above all the mysteries buried

in the self-revealing God. Mind cannot understand mystery, but it can lead us to that. Mystery is 'read' by the eye of faith. Faith is a super awareness, a combination of light and delight, vision and option, and mystery and certainty. The light of faith leads us to the Depth of our being. In the serenity of this Depth our consciousness rests. When the mind gets a taste of this, the mind too begins to rest in this Depth which is unfathomable and incomprehensible. Though not understood through the precision of logical thinking, the mind relishes the peace and joy emanating from this Depth and becomes a vehicle to carry this peace back to the world through the senses. The mind and the senses have a different mission now, a mission to announce peace to the world.

It is prayer, whether practiced as undisturbed meditation or unconditional surrender, that leads us to this Divine Depth. And Depth gives us peace. Hence in India we have this long-cherished tradition of singing peace-wish (*santi-mantra*) at the close of a conducted prayer service.

Aum Santi, Santi, Santi  
Aum Peace, Peace, Peace

## Under the Shadow of your Wings I Find My Peace

*From a world of lucrative business  
And ever increasing loneliness  
Lead me Lord to a fertile solitude  
Wherein I will converse with you in silence.*

*Rooted in you; enriched by you  
Franked by you; I fear not.  
In the shadow of your wings I will rest,  
Unperturbed, in serenity divine.*

*There, may I find my peace  
As my mind, fixed on you,  
And my heart, surrendered to you,  
Will see all in you and you in all.*

*Give me your power  
To remain the same  
In fame and blame,  
To feel your loving touch  
Which makes me steady and strong.*

## Chapter VI

# PRAYER AND SILENCE

**"Be still, and know that I am God" (Ps. 46:10).**

Young Benedict was born into a rich family. He never knew poverty, what it is to be in want; nor did he experience the disappointment of his dreams and wishes being unfulfilled. Life was easy. However, the world of plenty did not give him satisfaction. His heart longed for something, something that he could not yet articulate; that was not yet clear. This instinctive search, emerging from the depth of his consciousness, made him uneasy. What is that something for which my heart longs, he thought.

At that time Rome was in royal glory. Constantine the emperor, who declared Christianity as the official religion of the empire, was reigning there like a new Augustus Ceaser. Christians were free and privileged citizens of the empire. Born and brought up in a noble family, Benedict was well off and could easily gratify all his desires. But the



meaning of life remained an unsolved problem. Hence, the search continued.

Just as Buddha had left his palace in search of the meaning of suffering, so one day this young boy, too, left his royal house, went in search of that something which made him uneasy within. This was a journey which finally ended up on a mountain around three hundred kilometers away from Rome. It was a journey from the glorious city of Rome to an unknown mountainside. It was a journey from the outer layers of one's own existence to the innermost centre. There, entering into a cave on Mount Subiaco, Benedict entered into the cave of his heart; into deep silence and solitude.

Benedict was happy there where the cave on the mount and the cave of his heart merged into one and for the first time in his life he found what his heart was craving for: Silence. Can a human heart really long for something so negatively perceived? Is silence a negative concept? Does silence have such tremendous power to lead human consciousness to fulfillment?

Perhaps the Indian word for silence, *maunam*, will give us a clue to answer this question. The word *maunam* originates from the Sanskrit root *man*, meaning 'to think, to ponder on, or to meditate'.

*Mananam* is meditation. One who is absorbed in meditation is *muni*. *Maunam* or silence is a noun derived from *muni*. What belongs to *muni* is *maunam*. In other words, *maunam* is the *aura*, the halo, surrounding the mind of the *muni*. This mind, buried in silence is not a hollow mind, but a very holy mind, burning with the divine sparks of enlightened consciousness. Silence is not merely the empty absence of sound or words. It is the negation of the human art of communication through which sense or meaning is conveyed to the human mind. All forms of language, and arts of communication are limited. The more clearly articulate, the more limited they are. They cannot rise up to the boundlessness of the Infinite. Understanding or articulation, whether through senses or mind, is only a caricature of the real wisdom to be communicated. Hence, all of them should be abandoned in our ultimate search for the Ineffable. Here begins silence.

Silence is not simply tightening one's lips and refusing to talk. One has to pass through different layers of silence in order to reach and relish the hidden beauty and beatitude of silence. It starts with the silence of the atmosphere. Serenity from outside, unruffled atmospheric calm, is very conducive to the listening of the unuttered word of God. In an atmosphere of total non-utterance,

stilled and enrapturing solitude, one is drawn to listen what is beyond all utterances, to delve deep into the mystery of the unsaid. The very silence, thus, turns out to be a powerful speech which we can never capture, but are carried away with. In order to make this journey deeper into the heart of the mystery itself we need further and further degrees of silence.

The atmospheric silence is only the beginning. It is followed by the silence of the senses. Sensation is the beginning of our awareness. Senses always run after their sense-objects and are always busy with them. Often, we are not aware of what our senses are engaged in. We are simply lost and are driven away in the fleeting waters of sensation. This is what we call distraction, dis-traction, that is, being carried away. We put the senses into silence in order to listen to the word from within. But there are still many steps of silence to be followed through.<sup>7</sup>

Beyond the senses is the mind. The mind is very powerful as well as useful. The mind processes the sense-data and gives us what we call 'idea', for example, the idea of a flower. An idea is a wonderful thing. We have the world inside us through ideas. The mind keeps providing us with idea after idea. Even if we have silenced the senses

and put them to rest, the mind will provide us with ideas from its own store house which we call memory. The mind is full of ideas, and mental words, formed from the sense data. The mind is very busy with them. But whatever the mind gives, however excellent it is, is a product from without. The mind cannot give us wisdom that is divine by nature. Instead, the mind, with its self created thoughts, made out of sensation, can very well cover up the wisdom that is within us. Often we think that what the mind gives us is true wisdom and some stop there without any further search. But people who have experienced the Spirit, the mystics, sages and prophets (*Rishies*) tell us that there is much more beyond the mind. Hence, the mind is to be silenced in order to reach the inner most layer of consciousness within us. This is what the Indian sage, Patanjali, called *yoga* and defined it as 'stoppage of the thinking process of the mind' (*citta-vrtti-nirodha*).<sup>8</sup> There is an awareness beyond the thinking process of the mind. This is the awareness of the abiding Spirit within us. Real and eternal light flows from there, which is beyond the oral and mental words. Hence, this is communicated and relished in silence. Saints who have experienced this, speak about the silencing of the senses and the mind. They speak in terms of the dark night of the senses and of the spirit. For St. John of the cross, the Dark Night of the Spirit

consists of the dark nights of the intellect, will and memory, all of which operate in the mental realm. All of them are to be silenced.

It is this silence that leads us into the inner realm. Once the mind is silenced the inner eye of faith is open and becomes more operative. It is a "dark light", a super consciousness beyond the power of reason and argumentation. The silent mind 'understands' by admiration and absorption and begins to relish the mystery beyond all articulation. It is from this inexhaustible depth that we draw power, a power that will flow endlessly from within.

Abraham did not understand why his own son should be sacrificed. It sounded nonsense and perhaps quite idiotic. His mind even argued against it. But next morning he found that his faltering feet were taking steps, agonizing and incomprehensible as they were, to Mount Moriah where the child was to be sacrificed. What was happening within Abraham? Poignant though it is, Abraham, through an unfaltering determination, was answering the call of God with his whole being. There is a higher wisdom than the wisdom of the mind, that is the wisdom of faith, the wisdom that the Holy Spirit gives from within. Of course, this wisdom will later illumine the silenced mind. We

use the mind again in order to communicate the experience of the Spirit in unruffled peace and joy. The mind, purified as it is, then becomes a receptacle of the wisdom from within, instead of a processor of sense data from without. The senses also will fall in line with the mind and bring this wisdom into the world through our words and actions. But before that we need a journey into silence, silence of the atmosphere, senses and the mind.

The mind is silenced through concentration. Concentration is the first step in the process of silencing the mind. The last step is the absorption into the mystery that is profound and ineffable. Concentration is the focussing of the mind on one point of thought. In India we call it *ekagrata*, literally, one-pointedness of attention. But the mind may indulge in a discussion on that point, because it is not used to rest in simple awareness. Many beginners try to train the mind through discursive meditation. In this state the mind is not resting at all. Discursive meditation makes the mind tired, because it is really working. The mind is not silenced. It keeps producing thought after thought which are mental words. But after a few days the mind finds that this much argumentation is not necessary. From then onwards the mind focusses its attention on a single thought. It can now remain transfixed on a single thought, a simple *mantra*

remembered or silently chanted in the mind or even a simple image of the Lord kept alive therein. In the Carmelite Theresian tradition this is known as Prayer of Simplicity or prayer of Simple Look. Here the mind begins to rest insofar as the constant change of passing from one state to another is abandoned.

When your intellect, tossed about by the conflict of opinions, has become poised and firmly fixed in equilibrium, then you shall get into *yoga*<sup>9</sup>.

There are so many good theories and thoughts in the world. Even though many of them are spiritual, we are not bound to follow all of them. We have to decide what we want to become and choose it deliberately. We focus our unfaltering attention on it, be it a thought or image, and remain in silence. This is the Prayer of Simplicity. The mind is very much silenced, yet 'active' in attending to the 'thought'. It is not yet carried to the passive contemplation, not even to its first step. Even if the mind, at a later stage, may succeed in abandoning the 'thought' as such, which is a product of the mind, a seed of this thought will still be guiding the mind. The mind is not yet completely free from forming its own 'seedlings' of ideas. However, the mind can remain there undisturbed and in perfect peace. The mind easily clothes itself with that upon

which it concentrates. But this is still the work of the mind; of course, with the assistance of the Spirit and not the work of the Spirit as such, to which the mind is passively given. Yet it is a beautiful and beneficial preparation of the mind for passive contemplation.

It is up to the choice of the abiding Spirit to pour itself into this mind leading it into its own inner and incomprehensible depth. In this encounter the super-abundant light of the Spirit blinds the mind completely and guides it through darkness, that is a perfect silencing of the mind with regard to all human operation. The mind is now passive, but not idle; it is simply aware of what is happening beyond the realm of the mind itself. It is the light of faith, transcending the mind, that is at work here. Faith is not a product of the mind, but a gift of the Spirit. It is a deep and sharp awareness; an awareness of the Spirit itself, in which the mind, silenced as it is, rests completely.

### **The Liberating Power of Silence**

The power of silence is very great. Silence liberates and sets us free from the clutches of the senses and of the mind which build up their own castles around the divine flame shining in our hearts. By silencing the senses and the mental



process we get ready for the working of the Spirit within us. An ancient Indian text reads:

This Spirit, (Self) cannot be attained by instruction, nor by intellectual power, nor even through much hearing. He is to be attained only by the one whom the Spirit chooses. To such a one the Spirit reveals his own nature.<sup>10</sup>

Our Lord said:

No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him (Mt. 11:27).

Hence, the real wisdom is a matter of revelation. In fact, the Spirit is already within us as divine consciousness. Every human being is conceived as the expression of the Word, in the likeness of Jesus. We are all created in Him and are meant to be like him. It is the abiding light of this Word that should finally illumine us, opening our inner eye, making it luminous. We attribute this to the work of the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son that abides within us with the Father and the Son. It is silence that leads us to this inner Spirit. This inner Spirit is really light and delight, power and peace. Its nature is consciousness. It is the Spirit of the Word by whom, through whom and for whom everything was made. This consciousness should flow into our

mind and through the mind into our senses. This is called the coming of the Spirit or descent of the Spirit from above. In India we say, "the awakening of the Spirit," though in reality it is our mind that is now awakened to the wisdom of the Spirit. Until now the mind was not ready for the same; the mind was concerned with things which senses had brought to it, namely about the world. Silence has led the mind to a kind of real 'awakening'. Thus, *beyond the two eyes of the mind, reason and intuition, a new eye is open, the third eye, the luminous eye, by which, according to St. Ephrem, "it sees things as God sees."*

Then he opened their mind to understand the scriptures (Lk. 24:45).

So that the third eye may be opened we need to close the other two eyes, at least for some time. We need a path of silencing, a journey through the dark night, a passage through the 'cloud of unknowing'<sup>11</sup>.

Jesus said: Until the power from above comes down upon you, you must wait in the city (Lk. 24:49).

In other words: he said, "Get ready for the coming of the Spirit in prayer and silence. Let the Spirit be awakened. Then, empowered and illumined by the

Spirit, you go and witness to the power of God." The Spirit is power. The power of silence means the power of the Spirit. The Spirit speaks in the silence of the mind. The Spirit acts in the silence of the senses. The mind and senses of a spiritual person are Spirit-filled. "The power of God shall rest upon you" (Lk. 1:35b), the angel said to Mary. Although Mary did not understand and wondered at the words of the angel, Mary accepted the mystery embedded in the good news announced to her and remained in silence. Silence of the mind, which is not reasoning, is the submission of the mind to a higher wisdom, perceived through the eye of faith. The power of the Lord is the divine Spirit itself, which is the Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son, from the ultimate Source and the inner sense of all.

The Spirit empowers us from within and becomes light and delight (*cit* and *ananda*) and power and peace (*sakti* and *shanti*) within us. Jesus links the giving of his Spirit with power and peace:

Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I send you. Then he breathed on them and said, Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive people's sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven (Jn. 20: 21-23).

**"Power has Gone Out from Me"**

Through touch this power is handed over. In truth, this touch is the living faith of a person. The woman who was sick touched only at the edge of the cloak of our Lord, but this touch penetrated the heart of Jesus; because it was a touch of faith. Actually, it was her powerful eye of faith that pierced the compassionate heart of Jesus. He asked:

Who touched me?... Power has gone out from me (Lk. 8:45-46).

It was a senseless question because he was hemmed in on all sides by people. So Peter rightly said: "Master, the people are all round you and crowding in on you" (Lk. 8:45). But Jesus meant differently. Somebody had touched him through the eye of faith. The lady was led by only one thought, that the Lord was capable of saving her. Her mind was firmly fixed on the power of Jesus. This is the one pointedness of attention, *ekagrata*. We touch the Spirit through unswerving devotion and concentration; both of which characterize our faith. The devotee or the disciple fixes his/her attention on the master, surrenders totally to the master, so that the master might awaken and transform the disciple into an embodiment of divine consciousness just as the master already is. Jesus is

a true and everlasting embodiment of divine consciousness. By his touch he transforms us into what he really is. By touching him through our faith we dispose ourselves to transformation. The lady's faith was great. Hers was a total submission and surrender; only a tiny gesture was needed to remove the barrier which blocked the divine power flowing into her. She was instantly healed from her severe bleeding as well as saved from her inner sickness.

The divine power within us is to be channelled. The Holy Spirit abiding within us is the eternal source of this power. But the Spirit is to be touched by the eye of faith. Since neither sensation nor reason has the power to reach the Spirit, only faith can lead us into the inner core of this silent Spirit. This Spirit is a store house of light and delight, the height of wisdom and the fountain spring of joy and contentment. But we have to dispose ourselves by prayer, by concentration, by silencing the senses and the mind, to receive the Spirit, to allow the flow of the Spirit into us. This is what happens when we meditate, when we touch the Spirit by faith. An ancient Indian text says:

As oil is in sesame seed, as butter in cream, As  
water in hidden springs, and as fire in fire sticks,  
So is the *Atman* (Spirit) grasped in one's own self.

When one searches for him in truth and with fervour.<sup>11</sup>

The Spirit is present within us but he is invisible and not directly attainable. All the symbols enumerated speak about the hidden presence of the invisible Spirit. We have to grind the seeds in order to get oil, churn the milk for butter, bore the well for water and strike the matchstick for fire. In the same way we have to guide our minds by silencing it and focussing it totally on the Spirit through the eye of faith that the power of the Spirit may flow into it. This, however, should not be misunderstood as an automatic result of human endeavour. We cannot force the Spirit. It is always the flow of the Spirit and a passive reception of the Spirit in us. However, all the saints speak of the need of disposing the mind and the whole of our being for the reception of the Spirit. We have to empty the mind of all the unwanted stuff it has stored so that it can, unimpeded, receive the power of the Spirit into itself. In fact, the authors make a distinction between active and passive contemplation. Active contemplation is largely the silencing of the mind, focussing its attention on God alone through concentration and the continued denial of the inclinations of the mind to dwell upon the things of the world. Concentration, when continued, becomes meditation and slowly leads to the perfect

silencing of the mind. This leads us to what the saints call the passive contemplation which is simply a gift of the Spirit received by the soul. In this stage the soul and the mind along with it, are carried away by the Spirit. It becomes Spirit-filled, resplendent and illumined from within. It shines like a star in the sky, as St. Paul says in his letter to the Philippians:

You must shine among them like stars lighting up the sky (Phil. 2:15b).

## Thy Silent Words are the Source of My Wisdom

*From the clatter and clutter of my busied life  
Lead me Lord to thy abode of eternal silence.  
There, may I listen to thy unuttered words,  
The source and support of all wisdom.*

*Let wisdom emerge from woods\*  
As the trees and stones whisper to me  
Thy silent words of eternal worth  
In the peaceful rhythm of mother earth.*

*Give me patience to wait for thy words,  
Give me perseverance to listen to thee always  
Give me light to read your words in nature,  
Give me power to plunge into your silence.*

\* "Let wisdom emerge from woods" (*Vanadastu Vidyodaya*) is the motto of Vidyavanam Ashram, where this book has been written.



## Chapter VII

# WHAT IS PRAYER?

**"Lord, teach us to pray" (Lk.11:1).**

As far as a spiritual man is concerned prayer is one of the most common experiences. However, when it is asked: what is prayer, one may find it difficult to give a clear-cut answer. Sometimes more than one answer may emerge. This is not because the answer, first given, was wrong. Prayer is really multi-dimensional. It touches and moves different depths of the human being. At a higher state, it brings about a profound silence and reduces itself to a single and simple awareness which resides in the depth of one's heart. Is prayer then silence? Is prayer talking with God or listening to him? What about prayer of singing, praising and adoring? Is prayer action-bound? Is not surrender of my being the highest form of prayer?

Shyamala was a little girl. Her mother was a believing Hindu. She had taught the baby to pray before she went to bed. One evening, while I was

there, the girl came to her mummy, before going to bed. Mummy told her: "Go and pray, and go to bed." The girl went near a picture well placed on the wall, had her tiny hands folded and fixed on her chest, closed her eyes and stood for a few moments. Perhaps an exact imitation of what she has seen her mummy doing. Her prayer was over very soon. Then she said to her God: "See you tomorrow" and came back to her mummy to give her a parting kiss before she went to bed.

For Shyamala God was very real, personal and vividly present. Whatever God mummy has told her about, is her God; at this age she prays basically because her mummy prays. It is, however, extremely beautiful and highly enrapturing simply to look at a tiny child remaining absorbed in prayer. Prayer is a lovely scene to watch, an 'event' to experience, a happening that takes us to the deepest layers of our being. In prayer we transcend, we speak and we rest. In this chapter I want to look at prayer from these three angles. We will also try to define prayer from these three different yet related, perspectives: (1) prayer as a quest for transcendence (2) prayer as dialogue and union with God and (3) prayer as resting in God.

## 1. Prayer as Quest for Transcendence

In every human being there is an inherent tendency to transcend one's own self. Our human self is very much limited. All around us we witness every day our limitations. Life is full of the experience of limitation. The day dawns and ends up in the twilight of the dusk. The night follows. The deep stillness of the night is once again disturbed when the birds of the air and the domestic animals at home announce to us the dawn of a new day. Time rolls on and on through structures of limitation. I am born in a culture and country not of my choice. I have no 'say' in these matters. I am simply there, I can only accept the beginnings of my life. Of course, at a later stage, I can direct myself, yet only subject to structures of limitation. The socio-political events that turn my country upside down are not a matter of my decision or choice. But I have no option, but to live in it. We are surrounded by inherent limitations. This is part of our human nature. Embodied and engulfed by a world of constant change and transformation, we have no option, but to reconcile with our own limited conditioning, and direct our life, as far as possible, for a better future.

This is a marvellous possibility we have. Though limited, we can direct our own life. This is

possible for us, because the human essence is endowed with consciousness, which is a deeper awareness of its own self. This makes it capable of living above its own limitation. In spiritual parlance we call this abiding consciousness 'Spirit'. Spirit means breath, pointing to the fact that God has breathed his very consciousness into us.

We read in the Book of Genesis that God breathed his Spirit into Adam (Gen. 2:7). Human life begins with the breath of God. Later, we also see Jesus breathing his Spirit on his disciples (Jn. 20:22). This was the Spirit of Jesus and of his Father, meaning God's very Spirit. The inner content of the Spirit is consciousness. God is Spirit, we say. God is consciousness. (Existence with consciousness is by nature a person, as Christians understand the term, and is not necessarily always with the limitation of human personality.) God is Consciousness par excellence and thus supremely personal. Human beings are called to participate in this divine consciousness and to the level they participate, they rise above themselves in their orientation to the Divine. This is what I call transcendence. We are characterized by a sense of transcendence. In spite of all our limitations, we can transcend above them, we can choose our own future in time, with our rising consciousness. Consciousness has set us free with regard to everything in the world. Only in the

absolute, unlimited, pure consciousness, which is God, will this participating consciousness find its ultimate and lasting rest.

This inherent tendency in us to transcend our own selves, is the foundation of prayer. Philosophically seen, this very tendency is a kind of prayer. Prayer is a leap of transcendence from my experience of insufficiency to the Beyond and the Boundless, to the Fullness of life, which we call God.

### **Prayer as Living on the Path of Transcendence**

The tendency to transcend is universal and lies at the bottom of every human heart. The way it is expressed is very different. It depends largely on the nature and the field in which this consciousness is experienced.

The way or the manner of prayer may vary according to the state of each one's consciousness. Thus children pray for a cherished gift, to pass the exam or to overcome any hurdle they see on the way of their progress. What is happening here is that a child finds itself helpless and desires to overcome the situation. Because God is already conceived by him/her as all-powerful, the child raises his/her heart to this all-powerful God to transcend the limitation of his/her own abilities. The inner

dynamics of this prayer, though for a material gain for the moment, is an inherent drive to transcend or overcome one's limitation. In children it becomes their prayer. This does not mean that children do not pray with a pure intention, or that they are not in touch with God in their prayer. St. Therese of Lisieux, as a child, had already reached at a very high degree of prayer. Her prayer was not directed by earthly motivations, rather it was an ascent to a greater intimacy with God, her loving Father. The quest for transcendence is eminently seen in her prayer. St. Paul, who was flying high in spiritual consciousness, had a much different form of prayer. He prayed: "Who will separate me from this body and unite me with Christ?" This desire is certainly prayer and very clearly expresses the quest for transcendence from limited and mortal life and to be united with his Lord forever.

Think of an atheist. He does not pray. Is there a metaphysical type of prayer in him? I am inclined to give a positive answer to this question. He too has a tendency in him to transcend the trap of limitation he finds himself locked in. Karl Marx was an atheist. In his life the question of prayer did not surface at all. However, there was a question of commitment, a commitment to overcome the structures of injustice and oppression, which he witnessed around him. This decision to

rise above the situation, though strictly not prayer, was radically stemming from the same inner power of transcendence, which in a believer takes the form of a *prayerful* commitment.

The believer may stop with his prayer, while the atheist may enter into the field of action. In both cases the desire and ability to transcend the given situation is the ultimate source of zeal and commitment. Even in believers prayer will take various forms. This entirely depends on the level of each one's consciousness. The root and source of this phenomenon is the inherent power of transcendence with which our human existence is characterized. In its pure philosophical form, prayer is a movement of the finite consciousness to overcome its own finitude in its orientation to the Absolute. Union of two 'Consciousnesses' is what we call love. Hence prayer is our quest for union with God.

## 2. Prayer as Dialogue with God

The Absolute in its absoluteness is something unapproachable for all of us. The philosophical search reveals the Beyond and the Boundless as the source of everything we see, and every breath of life we are endowed with. But what this Absolute is, and how does he speak to us, is still unknown to us. This is only known when the Absolute deigns

to come down and speak to us an understandable human language. God, who is also the Word, the *nadabrahman*<sup>12</sup>, speaks out. This we call revelation. The great and profound mysteries hidden in the Godhead from the very beginning are slowly unveiled to us, through prophets, saints and sages. Thus, glimpses of God's nature become available to us. It is to these glimpses, which we relish, we also respond. The prophets of the Old Testament communicated to us many aspects of the Divine nature. God was presented as a loving bridegroom who loves and cares for his bride and as a powerful king who guides his people to victory. Accordingly, the people responded. Prayer was very much developed in the form of a dialogue with God. The Psalms are brilliant examples of this. Later, in the fullness of time, God revealed himself in Jesus Christ, who took us to his Father and also breathed into us his very Spirit, the Revealer of all mysteries.

Jesus became the visible face of the invisible God. Now we could speak to a God-man, have prayerful dialogue with him and proceed to an intimate and friendly union with him. The seeming separatedness of God from us enhanced *bhakti*, devotion. Naturally *bhajans* (hymns of praises), *namjapas* (litany of the names of the Lord) and adoration became part of our prayer structure. Theologically seen, prayer became a dialogue with



God in a wider sense, which included hymns of praise, litany of the names of the Lord, singing of psalms, etc. In fact, dialogue has a listening dimension. Quite often in popular Christian prayer this listening dimension is not properly understood. However, meditation was not totally given up, and was greatly fostered in monastic culture.

The need to serve God in a visible form, especially in human form, was fulfilled by the *avatara* dynamics in Hinduism, which believed that God comes down to deliver his people whenever the survival of *dharma*, righteousness, demands it. Thus several *avatars* ('coming down') were acknowledged and accepted. Beautiful hymns and *bhajans* were made in praise of them. Such dialogues with God, which are profoundly theological and prayerful, are in plenty. The world famous *Bhagavad Gita* is a masterpiece of this. The whole poem, in 18 chapters, is a dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna, symbolizing God and the soul. After the great epiphany of Krishna to Arjuna, Arjuna the receiver of the Divine vision, responds with love, adoration and surrender:

You are the imperishable, the Supreme Being to be realized. You are the great foundation of this universe; You are the imperishable guardian of Eternal Order (*dharma*). You are the ancient Person (*purusa*), I deem.<sup>13</sup>

Here prayer is very much a dialogue as well as a vision into the finitude of our being. At the same time it was an acknowledgement of our total dependence on God who reveals Himself to us. The *Gita* was written before Christ. It has been handed down to us, not so much with the claim of being a story, which was literally historical, but as an experience of God, revealing himself in a human form and instructing us with great lessons of spiritual realization. It is a human exigency to relate to God very personally and intimately, to a God who is approachable and in a human form.

When Jesus appeared on earth he chose his disciples from diverse strata of his society and taught them to pray. The great prayer he taught presents God in a very personal way, addressing him as "Our Father" (Lk. 11:1-4) Once again, prayer became a dialogue. The first part of this prayer is totally focussed on God and is concerned about His Kingdom, which the humankind want to see realized on this earth. In the second part, the soul comes to its weak and fragile self, prays for its daily needs and seeks God's help to transcend its own inherent limitations. The existential tendency of transcendence, philosophically perceptible, now becomes a theological prayer, in the sense that the prayer is addressed to a personal God who is revealed to us in Jesus Christ, our Lord. Prayer as

dialogue encourages intimacy and fosters one's union with God.

### **3. Prayer as Resting in God**

Prayer is transcendence; prayer is dialogue; but from a mystical point of view prayer often takes the form of a complete resting in the divine serenity of the Spirit abiding within oneself. This resting is not idleness or inactivity; but a giving in to the depths; a letting ourselves to be carried away by the one who abides in our own innermost recess. This resting is ultimately of the senses and of the mind. The consciousness, which is a subtle awareness within, is always awake, and does not need rest, because of its substantial independence from matter and material associates. So that we may come to this subtle awareness, we need to put our body, senses and mind to rest, in silence and serenity, the fruit of silence.

We are born and brought up in a world full of sense-objects. The senses act upon them and give us the experience of reality outside of us. The world does not leave us completely free of these experiences. It also leaves its impressions on our senses, which are brought later to our mind. Mind, after processing the data of sensation, produces ideas. Our senses and mind are always active, busy

with such objects. The result is what we call 'knowledge'. This knowledge is a 'residue' in the mind, distilled from the sensations we have had about different kinds of objects. It is a humanly made system of knowledge. If we want a superior kind of knowledge, a wisdom which God wants to communicate directly to our soul, we need to silence our senses and mind, to make room for God's communication. Here silence begins as the withdrawal of the senses from the sense-objects. When the senses are withdrawn from the sense-objects, then the senses are put into silence. In other words, the senses begin to rest. This resting is actually done by the command of the mind which wants to put a stop to its processing of the data which senses bring. The mind does this because it wants now to move more towards the innermost centre of the human self where God abides. In order that this may actually happen, it is not enough that the senses are put to rest, but the mind itself should find its rest from the continued processing dynamics, which Patanjali called *citta-vrtti*, the activity of the mind. As long as mind is busy with sense data, it cannot turn to the inner depth to receive God's own light. Only when the light of the Spirit falls on the mind, will it be inwardly illumined. For this, the stoppage of the activity of the mind (*citta-vrtti-nirodha*) which Patanjali calls *yoga*,<sup>14</sup> is a condition. This silencing of the mind is

achieved by intense concentration. Concentration is the focussing of one's attention totally and silently on the preferred object, be it a thing in the world, or an idea in the mind, or a visual image of the Lord or his abiding Spirit in oneself. In our case concentration is on the Lord or his Spirit abiding within us. Everything else is abandoned. But concentration is not the end of this journey; it is only the beginning of the silencing of the mind. This discipline and training of the mind is good and salutary and may lead one to what spiritual masters call 'active night'.

In the higher degree of a 'dark night', which is called 'the passive night' even the great theological 'ideas' and lovely 'images' of the Lord will be abandoned, because none of them can communicate the real and invisible reality of God. The Lord begins to communicate to us through his own Spirit. The Spirit alone can reveal to us the mysteries of God (Jn.16:13). The Spirit leads the mind to these mysteries which are really beyond the grasp of human reason, its fantasy, logic and argumentation. It is these dynamics that are silenced. Instead, the reason is led to the presence, the powerful and communicative abiding presence of the Lord within, who speaks through his Spirit. Prayer is again dialogue. But here the dialogue is in absolute silence, and listening to the 'silent sound' demands

perfect rest of the mind and the senses. Thus, silencing becomes a blissful resting and a profounder knowing.<sup>15</sup> It is listening to the unuttered Word which the ancient seers of wisdom called *sruti*, the content of revelation. This happens in resting. This resting is twofold. It is a resting in a negative sense as the senses and the mind are withdrawn from their proper objects. But more than that, this is a resting of the soul, of the human consciousness, in the Word, in the Divine Consciousness, who is the sole foundation and fountain head of human consciousness. It is a profound resting of the human spirit in the divine Spirit which Spirit abides in the human heart. "Abide in me and I abide in you" (Jn. 15:5). Yes, this resting is the realization of this text, which happens in the innermost depth of our human soul.

Prayer now becomes resting in the Lord and is known in India as *samadhi*<sup>16</sup>, instead of ecstasy. It is said to be *samadhi* as it points to a state of perfect equanimity (*samadhi*). The Sanskrit word *samadhi* (*sama*+*dhi*) literally means equal-mind. Hence, it is translated as equanimity. Indian religious scriptures extol this high spirit of equanimity, a divine serenity, in a holy person:

Balanced in pleasure and pain, self abiding,  
viewing a clod of earth, a stone and gold alike;

the same to agreeable and disagreeable, firm, the same in censure and praise; the same in honour and dishonour, the same to friend and foe, abandoning all undertakings – he is said to have risen above the forces of nature.<sup>17</sup>

To remain the same in fame and blame is really great. Jesus remained in peaceful serenity when the jubilant people of Israel praised and cheered him on, singing "Hosanna to the Son of David", and when, as an angry crowd, they rejected him with scorn and insult. This equanimity, steadiness of consciousness, is a sign of one's rootedness in the unshakable ground of the Divine Depths, which is ever serene and peaceful. Therefore, Jesus blessed us with his parting gift of peace and divine serenity: "My peace I give to you" (Jn. 14:27). One can imagine the Lord saying: "As my human soul rests in the Word and the Word in God, my Father, so must your soul rest in me and through me in my Father. Do not be afraid or upset. Be ever peaceful and peace-emanating."

This resting is not a mere passivity. It is a deep relishing of the divine Bliss and Peace, soundless and formless, and is preceded by an abandonment of everything else, except God. This spirit of renunciation is again not a negative attitude to life, but an expression of the soul's quest for transcendence and the blissful result of its successful

achievement of this goal. This sense of transcendence in resting is more clearly expressed in the English word ecstasy which literally means standing out (ecstasy) of its own silenced body: sense and mind. The Indian word *samadhi*, equanimity, highlights another aspect: depth is peace and in this Divine Depth the soul rests. Literally speaking, there is no dialogue in this profound state of union and inter-penetration of consciousness; but there is an intense and ongoing communication, resulting in the transformation of the human consciousness into the divine. Prayer in its profoundness is this ongoing transformation which the Fathers of the Church called Theosis<sup>18</sup> or divinization.

Yes, you and I are called to be 'divinized' and to send forth the peaceful rays of divinization to all. Let our prayer achieve this goal.



*Once upon a time a tiny fish asked its mother: where is the thing called ocean? The mother fish replied: "Ocean is where you live, swim and rest." In the same way we may still ask the question: where is the Spirit, though the Spirit is in us, and is that in which we are, move about and rest.*



## Chapter VIII

# CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER

## Prayer and Mysticism

Many of us, good lay-people and religious, think that we are not mystics. We are just ordinary people, destined to pray in the church or house and rarely alone. That is all our prayer life. Mystics are a group of people, we think, perhaps picked up directly by the hand of God, who is raised to high degrees of prayer life. We can only look at them from below and express our respect and regards for them. Our life of mysticism ends there and we re-coil ourselves to the ordinary ways of 'saying prayers' or 'seeing and doing' holy mass etc.

I think that this attitude has emerged because of a deep misunderstanding about contemplative prayer which in essence is the same as Christian mysticism. This confusion is all the more strengthened because mysticism is often presented in common parlance as an area of extra ordinary phenomenon, such as being lifted up from the earth,

being capable of reading others mind and so on. The word ec-stasy, which literally means 'standing out', which the mystics are supposed to have experienced also adds to this confusion.

The true mysticism does not necessarily need any visible extra ordinary experience. All spiritual masters of mystical prayer, irrespective of religion, such as Mother Theresa of Avila, John of the Cross, Patanjali, the author of Yoga-sutra, warn us not to give any importance to such super human experiences. They may even distract us. When they happen, we have to leave them as they are, neither reacting against them nor extolling them as a sign of our ascendancy in prayer life. This may be a great illusion.

### **Mysticism as Growth in Prayer Life**

However, real mysticism means that you grow in your prayer life. The objective of every prayer is union with God. Prayer is not just prayer of petition, though there is nothing wrong in this. Prayer is also a great means we have to use to read the mind of God as far as we are concerned. Jesus prayed in Gethsemane: "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Mt. 26:39). It sounds like a petition. Of course, it was really so. But for Jesus

this prayer was only a journey to his Father's will. The second time He slightly changes the words: "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, thy will be done" (Mt. 26:42). This is a model for us how in our prayer our words slowly change and by the time we end the prayer, we are ready to accept not our desire, but what God has designed for us. So Jesus got up and courageously walked down the mount to face the opponents who want to arrest him. Prayer is a means by which we come in union with God. This does not mean that we have an ec-static, sweet, consoling experience of God. Jesus did not have it. Instead he had to face the miserable negligence of his own disciples, the crucial betrayal by one of them and the pre-determined enmity of a crowd. In spite of these external factors his awareness, will, remained one with his Father. His prayer was a very deep contemplative prayer, which Jesus preferred to do all alone, and his will was completely united with that of his Father. If our prayer achieves this goal nothing more is to be looked for. We are already mystics, in the sense that we have found the unity of both wills, which we were searching for.

### **Search for Unity in Mysticism**

Udhalaka Aruni is a venerable master in the Chandogya Upanishad. His disciple was his own

son, Svetaketu. One day Udhalaka thought of giving a lesson to his disciple about the ultimate unity of all in one which alone is to be sought after. He called his son and told him "bring me a fruit of a banian tree and cut it into two". This was immediately done. Then Udhalaka asked Svetaketu: "what do you see in it"? "Very small seeds", the boy answered. "Break one of them, my son", father said. The boy cut a seed into two pieces. Father again asked: "what do you see in it now?" "Nothing at all", the son answered. Then his father spoke to him: "My son, from the very essence in the seed which you cannot see comes in truth this huge banian tree. Believe me, my son, an invisible and subtle essence is the Spirit of the whole universe. That is reality. That is Atman. That thou art." This search into the Ultimate, which is invisible, clearly shows a mystic tendency to rise above everything in this world and reach a solid, reliable ground of all in one. This is the Imperishable One, the Immortal. Udhalaka also added: "This is the Atman within you"<sup>19</sup>. By this Udhalaka meant that what is the most transcendent is also the most immanent within you. God is not only in heaven, but also in our heart. Mystics want to come in touch with this God, not as an idea in the mind, but as a real person who loves us, is united with us and has set a final goal for us, that is, to be with him forever. To know God, who is

beyond all names and forms, in a personal way we need revelation. Hence God condescends and reveals himself to us.

## Christian Mysticism

Christians believe that God has revealed himself to us in Jesus Christ. Jesus said: "No one knows who the Father is, except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him". (Lk.10:22). St. Paul presents this Jesus before us for our imitation:

Have this mind among yourself, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men (Phil. 2:5-7).

Paul is asking us to focus our attention on Jesus to be free from all fetters of attachments and follow the example of Jesus Christ that we be united with Him and get transformed into Him. This is what the mystics want to do: to be in touch with the real God, not only with the symbols of God which abounds in nature. In the heart of heart, they want to transcend all forms of prayers, though they are used for union with God to whom these prayers are uttered. Whenever you transcend the world of

plurality and impermanence and your soul rest in the Lord, you are on the threshold of mysticism. What matters here is not any super-human experience, but the real unity with God, that is, of your will with the will of God. You are united with God by knowing and loving him. Very often, by knowing God, we make God the object of our mind. This is the work of reason. God known by reason is of course valid, but is only a caricature of our mind and as long as we remain in the level of reason, our knowledge of God is not direct or mystical. For knowing God directly we have to move from reason to faith. Faith is the way par excellence to know God. Faith is also our answer and submission to a self-revealing God. Hence, St. John of the Cross, before beginning the interpretation of the poem, *The Ascent to Mount Carmel*, excludes all forms of sensible and rational understandings and clings to faith alone as the sure path to mystical knowledge, though he confesses that faith is a dark and confused way of knowing God directly.<sup>20</sup> Yet it is a certain and totally reliable way of knowing and therefore worth pursuing.

Moving on the way of faith we have to be careful about two possible exaggerations. 1. Over rationalization of the content of faith. 2. Identification of faith with any superstition. The first is an intellectual quest to understand the

doctrinal content in faith and as such is a very welcome exercise. However, one has to understand the real faith is not in the realm of reason, but beyond it, where reason finds an abode to reside, rest and relish the mysteries of God, now being communicated to it with God's own revealing light and sometimes also with delight. What I want to make clear to my readers is that our rationalization on faith doctrines is not necessarily our growth in the life of faith. The real growth in faith is in our surrender of life to what is revealed to us, as Mary surrendered and said: "Let this happen in me" (Lk. 1:38). However, we should also be on our guard not to identify faith with any superstition, believing any imagined story carved around the revelation event as sacrosanct and unchangeable. True faith is a gift from God, not a conclusion of our reasoning mind nor a construct of our imaginative fantasy. When we see things through the eye of God our faith becomes active in us. God's way of seeing must be God's own gift to us. Then begins a different vision, a different value system and naturally a different life-style. St. Francis of Assisi left his parents and prestige in the society, opted for poverty and the life-style of the poor, not after doing many years of social analysis in order to understand how the system works, but simply motivated by a living faith which was far more powerful than any amount of scrutiny and

academic erudition of oppressive structures in the society. His unwavering faith in Jesus Christ led him to opt for the poverty of Christ, and naturally his identification with the poor. He was definitely a mystic, always seeing things through the eyes of Jesus Christ, and identifies himself with Christ, the poor, and the poor of Christ in the world. God's way of thinking is freely given to everyone of us with a good will. So to be a mystic what we need is to abandon our way of thinking and doing and accept instead, God's own way of thinking and doing. This gift is available to everyone, to the rich and the poor, to the well educated and the uneducated. What is necessary is a humble and simple heart, open to the mysteries of God's love and the ways of its operation in the human soul. St. Teresa of Avila is a mystic and a great teacher of mystical prayer. Time and again she says that she is not well educated and she does not know much theology and so on. But God has chosen her and revealed to her the mysteries of divine love taking place in a human soul. She wrote them down under obedience to the confessor who asked her to write, thinking that this may be eventually useful to some good souls. Her writings have become a classical text on mysticism. We all learn from that. So do not think that mysticism or mystical prayer is unavailable to ordinary men and women. It is possible for everyone, irrespective of your gender,



status, learning or wealth. But there is one condition and that is equal for all. You should abandon everything else. "God alone suffices". This is the unconditional *sutra* or *mantra* (caption or watch-word) of all mystics. Hence, the wealthy one, if he or she wants to rise to the heights of divine love, he or she should give up all desire to possess wealth, to keep his/her heart on them and make the heart empty and free for divine love alone. In the same way, the poor one, who longs for mystical union with the Lord, should be free from all craving for wealth and affluence which wealth may bring. This is the only condition, namely, be free from all attachments. Everything else, whatever is needed, will be given with it. This condition is rather strict, because if we want to receive more love from God, more room must be there in our hearts. If the heart is full of passionate affections, attachment and bondages, how are we free to love God above everything? Hence, Jesus gave this strong warning to the crowd which wanted to follow him:

If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple (Lk.14: 26).

This may sound too bad or too strict for some of us, because we are not used to this kind of language. But the inner core of this message is not that bad.

The word 'hate' here does not mean literally 'to hate' the persons, but to be free from the bondage which make you unfree to love and serve God. To experience this we have to understand one thing: the mystical prayer is after all mystical love and union with God. Mysticism is not high degree hallucinations, extra ordinary experiences, and miraculous surprises. All these are distractions rather than directions. On the contrary, the invitation to mystical prayer is an invitation to an entry into the world of divine love, namely into an ocean of unbounded divine love. Hence, you are not going to be love-starved, but love-filled; but with a different kind of love, a pure love without selfishness. God's love for us is a self-giving, sacrificing love. The mystics are invited to participate in this nature of love. That is, other kinds of attachments, which do not liberate us, are to be abandoned. Once again it is not love or affection to other persons or beings that is to be abandoned. It is the enslaving bondage to them. Love is the greatest commandment of our Lord. You are invited to this great whirlpool of love, but just like God's love is, to a self-offering love. The mystics, especially those who are touched by God, are people of tender and affectionate love. They look at everything with affection and love; see the face of their beloved Lord in everything. Everything is in the same way sacred, because all carry the image

of the Lord. It is into this world of love that you are invited. Life here is beautiful, peaceful and joyful. Of course it demands sacrifices, but because love is the working force behind it, sacrifices become not only possible, but also pleasing. Look at the picture of St. Therese of Lisieux with the crucifix covered by rose flowers. For Therese, the mystic, sacrifices are like roses and her unbounded love for the Lord overflowed to all, especially to the missionaries toiling in boiling heat in the East. The Catholic Church declared this young girl of 24, who spent the major part of her life within the four walls of her cloistered convent, as the patroness of all missionaries. This is the way faith works and we need faith also to accept her as the patroness of missionaries. A mystic and a missionary can go together. Burning love is the inner core of both. What does this mean? If you are a mystic, your heart burns with love for the Lord. This love overflows to all others as a self-sacrificing love and dedication to service. Your heart is always happy, and not grumbling, because as St. Paul says: "No creature can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord" (Rom: 8: 38b).

Many devout souls are in union with God. Quite often this could be in our mind level where the Lord is an ever-remaining object of our mind. What we keep in our mind need not be that which

we always opt. The mystics opt, go beyond the mind, in search of the real person of the Lord, hidden under the images and ideas, and embrace him with affection and admiration, and above all with surrender. This is a different experience and is better understood by the language of the heart than that of the mind. Neither intellectual acumen nor academic erudition is a must. What is needed is a simple and serene heart, ready to love, to surrender, to live and to serve. Mysticism is so simple, provided you have a determined will.

What does surrender mean to a loving couple with children? A good family is a small heaven on earth. Love is what unites the members of the family. Mutual trust, mutual love and mutual surrender are the hallmark of a good family blessed by God. The members also have mutual responsibilities. Hence, surrender does not mean to give up responsibilities to one another and just be with God. The children are precious gifts the parents have received from God. God has entrusted them to their loving care. They are also children of God and parents are their caretakers on the earth. They are to be groomed to maturity in an atmosphere of love, joy and peace. However, they are also to be initiated to sacrifice themselves as they are called to see the same sacrificing love between their parents and to them. However, the parents

should think that these children are free individual persons, free to choose their own destiny in course of time. This may include their freedom to choose their partner in marriage, or to follow a religious vocation, in case they decide to do so. Surrender means that the parents do not stand in the way of their basic decision, but give their love and guidance, if needed. Surrender also means to carry out their household duties patiently and joyfully, even when love fails from one member of the family. This means that all are related to God with a greater bond than the bond they bear to one another. Since all relations are primarily God-centered, all bonds between the members become liberating and not enslaving and therefore do not weigh down to the level of bondage. This will be a happy family surrendered to the Lord.

### **The Path through Darkness**

Then what about the dark night, the night of the senses, the night of the soul etc? None of these must bother us in advance. It is the Holy Spirit which is the spirit of the God you love, who guides the soul in this journey. No one else can open your inner eye, to make you see things as God sees and guide your steps with precise know-how. Trust him and surrender to his holy hands. Think of the symbol of the lift, which St. Therese uses, which

was just being introduced in France at that time. You place yourself on this holy lift, the wings of the Holy Spirit, and then he will take you to the ultimate goal, step by step, always unfolding what is necessary for the day and what you can absorb and assimilate. The Lord does not want that you get pre-occupied and waste your time with things that are not there. "Do not worry about tomorrow" (Mt. 6:34).

St. Teresa of Avila, our great teacher on mysticism, does speak eloquently about the suspension of the faculties, especially of the intellect. She also clearly says this is something that happens when the Lord takes over the guidance personally at least for a few moments, and is not to be initiated or accelerated by the soul on journey. So be sure, when it happens the Lord will be there to guide you, though he may cover his face and speak to you rather silently. But be sure he is there and if a human guide is necessary, be sure that he will see to it. My point is this. Do not be afraid. Do not think mysticism is not for me. I am born or I have become a religious just to say some prayers and perform a good job. I do not think that this is worth opting for a soul who wants to love God more, and especially for a celibate. Love without intimacy is arid and even annoying at times. This is true of any love. Our love of God also must be

blessed with special moments of intimacy. The Lord should directly speak to us, touch us and transform us. Then only will our soul open up, blossom and bear fruits. Just like the morning rays of the rising sun touches and opens up the petals of the lotus in the pond and lilies in the field, so also the living rays of the Lord kisses and awakens our soul, opens it up, gives it new vigour and vitality and beautifies it with his own divine splendour. This should happen in our lives. Let the Lord touch you with his splendid rays. You are then entering the world of mysticism. You move from reason to faith, head to heart, from symbols to the symbolized. The whole universe is full of symbols and the Lord and his divine Spirit is the symbolized. You may be a married or unmarried person or a religious. All of you need a direct contact with the Lord. Your prayers are always a medium for this direct contact. But it does not happen always, not even for great saints. When it happens, it fills our hearts, throws out our sorrows at least for a moment, gives us strength and we become tender and pliable instruments in the hands of the Lord. The Lord shapes us, transforms us to his likeness and elevates us to himself. This is the goal of all contemplative prayer.

### The Four Degrees of Prayer

I have already said before how St. Teresa of Avila is a great teacher of contemplative prayer. With the rich experience of her own journey into the depths of prayer life and blessed with a vivid and powerful imaginative thinking, Teresa presents before us the degrees of prayer with the symbolism of watering a garden. The soul is this garden. No Gardener can take care of the garden without water. Not only plants need water, but all bodily forms of life depend on water for their survival. We are so desperately dependent on many cosmic elements that we are made aware of how much our soul is dependent on the Spirit, who is symbolized by each of the elements of the universe. As all bodily forms of life need water so does our soul depend on the Holy Spirit for all our spiritual operations. Essentially prayer is a means to remain in union with this Spirit. This is done by way of receiving inspiration, surrendering ourselves to him with or without words, co-operating with Him to be transformed by the work of the Spirit. In this symbolism of the garden and water, the soul is the garden, water is the Spirit and the plants are the virtues that grow in the garden.

The first degree of prayer is like drawing water from a well with a bucket. We have to put the



bucket into the well, hold the rope, and roll it down on the wheel till it reaches the deep water in the well. In the same way we have to pull the bucket back to us. The bucket may swing either side, striking on the walls of the well, spilling a lot of water back to the well. The cracking noise of the rolling wheel and the striking sound of the swinging bucket are unavoidable. In short, a lot of work is done and a lot of sound is made and you get very little water. This is the first degree of prayer, where a lot of prayers are said, rituals performed, processions made, but the net result of the union with the Lord is minimal.

In the second degree the gardener uses aquaducts in order to water the garden. The labour is considerably less. Yet the gardener has to open and channel the water to the destined location. Water flows by itself, naturally giving us less labour and more water. St. Teresa calls this second degree the prayer of quiet. The soul has learned to concentrate more, can remain in union with the Lord with less written form of prayers and even in silence. The plants in the garden begin to sprout and shoot-forth lovely blades, getting ready to bloom.

In the third degree the soul has advanced further. This is compared to the flow of a river

through the garden. The gardener is happy, because the very river of water, the Holy Spirit, flows continuously, soaks the ground where the plants are and flows away. Teresa says that in this state the faculties enter into deeper rest. They are united with the Lord, though not yet completely absorbed. "This prayer is a sleep of the faculties: the faculties neither fail entirely to the function nor understand how they function"<sup>21</sup>. The plants begin to bloom and flowers open up. But the rivers are not always steady and serene. They are subject to ups and downs as they flow in and out. They too make noise. But the river, as long as it is a running river, has continuity of the flow of water. In the same way, the soul is in a continuous union with the Lord, converses with him always, though silently. Prayer has already become a matter of attitude rather than carefully uttering studied prayers. However, the soul has to grow further into the steadiness of consciousness, ready to accept good and bad alike, praise and blame equally, just for the glory of the Lord. The faculties enter into a profound rest, which she calls "sleeping of the faculties". "For the truth of the matter is that the faculties are almost totally united with God but not so absorbed as not to function"<sup>22</sup> The plants in the garden (virtues) begin to blossom and spread their heavenly fragrance all around.

In the fourth degree 'the water is provided by a great deal of rain'. Now, the Lord himself waters the garden from heaven, the human labour is completely given up, except allowing to be watered thoroughly as being bathed in the torrential flow from heaven. "This heavenly water soaks and saturates this entire garden"<sup>23</sup>. This is certainly a superior way of prayer and all the faculties of the soul are united in one experience of the Lord without any resistance. But unfortunately, this is not a state of prayer in which the soul always remains. The praying soul is still on earth, comes back to the ordinary realities of life. The remembrance of this moment of experience certainly remains and gives her tremendous strength and enthusiasm. St. Teresa continues to speak on the nature of the union of the soul with the Lord in this stage and the favours the soul receives from him. I have summarized here what St. Teresa is treating in eleven chapters (11-22) of her autobiography, *The Book of Her Life*.

What we have to notice here is the following:

1. The mystical prayer leads you to greater and greater union with God. Here the word prayer does not mean "saying prayers", but the way you are relating to God or getting

united with him. The higher degree means the greater union.

2. The human soul is endowed with faculties. The faculties are intellect, will and memory. Teresa speaks also of imagination and incidentally also sensation. There is a proportionate relation between the advance in prayer and silence of the faculties. The faculties of intellect, will and memory all depend on our sense experience for their natural human operation. When God begins to communicate to the soul directly, that is through faith than through reason, the faculties have to retire and rest; otherwise they will be distracting the soul.
3. The union is taking place in the depth of the soul, which is by nature spirit, that is consciousness characterized or transformed by the Holy Spirit. The faculties are invited to participate in the blessed joy and peace of this union. Hence, the need of sleeping or resting of the faculties and finally a complete passive assimilation of them into the divine operation.
4. Teresa is very clear that the higher degrees of prayer are certainly the gift of the Lord. It is not a result of human endeavour. In the first

degree a lot of human endeavour is demanded. From the second degree onwards the active human works to achieve the goal steadily decreases. But this is not idleness or total inactivity, a criticism that was raised even against St. John of the Cross. God is operating in the soul through and through. He purifies, enlightens and transforms the soul to his own likeness. The soul steadily gives in. The more the surrender the more the Lord takes possession of the soul. Therefore, the faculties are at rest, but participate in the ever-increasing bliss and beauty of the soul.

5. Please do not think: "This is not for me". This is for all of us, lay or religious. If we do not enjoy our intimacy with the Lord with the union of our wills with his (human and divine consciousness), then what is the ultimate goal of our prayer life! This way is very simple: just forget everything, surrender everything, and allow yourself to be totally transformed by the Lord. I have already explained what surrender means to parents and children.

## Chapter IX

# Mary the Model of our Contemplative Prayer

### Mary and Mysticism

My admiration of Mary, our Divine Mother, always keeps increasing when I meditate on her simplicity. She is just there as a simple, stainless woman from a village, serene and deeply believing in God's words and always praying. Of course, she is very great: "Our stained natures solitary boast" (Wordsworth). But the beauty of this woman is this: the greater her status, the deeper is her humility and simplicity. The amazing combination of these both makes her simplicity admirable, greatly lovable and above all a unique model for our imitation. Let us now look at her as a model for our contemplative prayer. We should not think that a person of contemplative prayer would pray only in silence. No, this is not true. This person may sing a song with clapping her hands, or even dance it out more devotedly and prayerfully. I always think that our classical Indian dance is certainly one

of the most congenial ways of expressing prayer as complete surrender, literally integrating words and meaning, melody and rhythm, body and gestures. Mary sang the great hymn of *magnificat* which is a paradigm hymn of a devotee.

Luke, the evangelist, gives us two sentences, which very well summarize the contemplative life of Mary. They are: "Mary remembered all these things and thought deeply about them" (Lk. 2:19); "Mary kept all these things in her heart" (Lk. 2:51).

**1. "Mary remembered all these things and thought deeply about them" (Lk. 2:19).**

The immediate context of this text is the shepherd's witnessing what they saw and heard: the angel's words, celestial hymns of praise, and the sign to discover the newborn Baby. Mary heard this and "all those who heard were amazed" (Lk. 2:18). Naturally Mary also was filled with divine awe and wonder. But to Mary these words meant much more. She is confronting a shattering reality, namely, a complete absence of that God, who sent the angel Gabriel and made wonderful promises. The words were great and there was no lack of royal splendour promised to the Prince Jesus and his dynasty which will never end. But the reality, what is happening on the earth in front of her, was exactly

the opposite. Let there be no palace matching to the heights of Augustus Caesar, but at least why not a single room in the inn? And why at this crucial moment Augustus decides for a census? Why this Baby, the great Prince of peace be born no where, with the unique company of innocent animals in the dead silence of an insignificant village unnoticed by all? The paradoxical contrast between the royal promises and the real events is too much for Mary to bear. Completely stunned and silenced, yet firmly and courageously trusting all that the Lord has said, Mary remembers everything, in a piercing silence, where words have lost all meaning and speech becomes impossible. Faith alone is the way. Hence, no complaints, no argumentation, no longing for a glamorous confirmation of the promise.

When realities fail, and the promises crumple to dust and you yourself are thrown to a ruthless aloofness, what is the way to proceed? Mary says: "Faith alone is our way". Do not lose heart. To those who trust, the Lord is always near.

Yes, suddenly, when it was least expected, there comes a surprising visit. The poor shepherds, with exuberant joy, bring the glad tidings of a vision. Yes, the angels from heaven, and an army of them singing good news to the whole world. Mary



remembers the Angel Gabriel who had brought the glad tiding ten months ago to her home in Nazareth. But now there is no trace of him. She found herself miserably thrown to the mercy of the situation and that too in the most crucial moment in a woman's life, when a little space of privacy meant much more than the comforts of a royal palace. But everything was denied to Mary and Mary accepted everything, not so much understanding what is happening, but simply admiring the strange combination of events, which is nonsense for an argumentative reasoning, but pearls of sense for a contemplative mind to ponder on. "Mary remembered all these things and deeply pondered about them".

Our contemplation is not rationalization. Rather, at a stage, the contemplative mind gives up reasoning. As Teresa says, the faculties return to rest and give way to the superior vision of an amazing gaze with the eye of faith. This is what Mary was doing. Naturally the gaze sinks deep into her heart and equally into the nature of events. The contemplative does not run away from the ordeal of life. It is in the midst of real events, however agonizing they are, we have to live our faith. Whatever the Lord has in store for us, as the events of the unknown morrow, the contemplatives accept with an affectionate embrace and ponder

over them with serenity of mind and heart, until they are integrated and assimilated into their being.

This contemplative way of thinking is not a waste of time. It is through this penetrating look events are stripped off their outer appearance and read from within, as designed by God from all eternity. Mary's deep thinking was exactly that and by her continued pondering she integrated each event into her life as part and parcel of a becoming process, which was especially so after the moment of the annunciation.

Mary's contemplative prayer is a model for us. We also find ourselves miserably thrown to the mercy of a situation. All those who made wonderful promises have skillfully disappeared. As Mary meditated over them, let us find refuge in a contemplative look at the events. The Lord will unveil mysteries hidden in them; make us capable of facing the events, though not changing them.

## **2. "Mary kept all these things in her heart" (Lk. 2:51).**

The second text, though basically the same in content, adds new dimension to Mary's contemplative prayer. "Mary kept all these things in her heart" (Lk. 2:51). There are two ways of

keeping something in our memory. One is in the memory of the mind. The other is in the memory of the heart. In reality the file of the brain memory cell may be one and the same. The difference is the difference between head and heart, reason and faith, knowing and opting. Heart goes with faith and option, whereas head goes with reason and knowing. Knowing gives us ideas. But knowing is not always opting. One can keep many good ideas in the mind. But the same person may not even lift a finger to practice in life what has been stored in the mind. This was a criticism Jesus raised against some of the Jewish leaders of his time. Good or high ideas do not necessarily make us holy. An idea should become an opted value. Then it moves us to the area of realization. They become ideals and are kept in the heart, symbolizing with what affection and ardour they are kept in the memory. The evangelist says: "Mary kept all these things in the heart". That is, affectionately pondering over them and realizing them in her actual life.

We in India say that meditation is a golden means for obtaining the knowledge of God (*dhyana*, *brhama-vijnana-sadhana*). Here meditation does not mean arid, argumentative thinking. Instead, it is a composite of three ways of interior realization: listening, pondering and realizing (*sravanam*, *manana* and *nididhyasanam*). The devotee listens to

the word of God, ponders over it and through continued repetition of the same realizes it in oneself. Mary's deep thinking as mentioned earlier (2:19) and keeping them in her heart (2:59) is in fact equivalent to realizing, because 'you become what you meditate'. Our meditation must be a means for our realization. Contemplative prayer is always a movement towards realization.

The context of this text is worth considering. Mary and Joseph with sorrow in their heart, go back to the temple of Jerusalem in search of the Child Jesus. To their great surprise they see him discussing with the teachers of the law. The baby for whom "there was no place in the inn" (Lk. 2: 7b) and who "is destined to become a sign of contradiction in Israel" (Lk. 2: 34b), is now seen in the temple "sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions" (Lk. 2:46b). Mary, the mother of the baby, was greatly surprised to see Jesus posing questions to the learned ones. Her sorrow and anxiety gave way to a sigh of relief and a reassurance of her motherhood. An exclamation was quiet natural. Mary said: "Son, why you have treated us so? Behold your father and I have been looking for you anxiously" (Lk.2: 48). In other words, Mary thought, why is it so? Why has this loving son with all his insightful intelligence and deep affection leave us behind

without much concern for us? To this emotionally charged motherly question Mary did not receive an expected answer. Instead Jesus, who was still a child for his mother, gave her an official and rather unsympathetic answer. "How is it that you sought me? Did you not know I must be in my Father's house" (Lk. 2:49). The abrupt and too formal an answer did not tally with the motherly emotion and freedom with which Mary put the question. Naturally, Mary (and also Joseph) did not understand the meaning of this official answer. Jesus suddenly becomes the official 'He', the divine person, born of a woman, whose father's house is the temple of Jerusalem. Of course, by this time Mary might have guessed the role Jerusalem temple has to play in the life of Jesus. However, the suddenness of an unexpected answer and the total lack of emotional content were perhaps too surprising for Mary, a mother. "And they did not understand the saying which he spoke to them (2:50). However, the evangelist concludes: "And his mother kept all these things in her heart" (2:51b).

What do we keep in our heart for pondering? Is it what we understand or what we do not understand? What we clearly understand does not have the shroud of mystery hidden in it. What we do not understand and yet have an irresistible appeal for, has a lot of mystery hidden in it. These

mysteries cannot be solved as problems at our will, but will unveil themselves in course of time, if we keep them in our heart. Our continued pondering over them removes the veil and reveals the mystery hidden for us.

Contemplation is nothing, but this pondering, the remembrance of what the Lord is doing in you and around you. We all need this in order to keep our peace steady and life blooming, in spite of the unexpected sequence of events.

Contemplatives also cultivate a preferential option to keep all their experiences in the heart than in the mind, because heart contains all with flesh and blood, whereas mind strips the individuality of all events and persons too. The entire journey is the journey of faith. Faith demands option, and option is not understanding but acceptance, even of that which we do not understand.

### **3. "But standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and..." (Jn. 19:25)**

When the Blood of the most innocent man mingled with the mud of the mount, there on the Calvary hill stood a woman, born immaculate who knew no sin, witnessing the very brutal death of her dear and only son. This woman is Mary, the

mother of Jesus. She stands near the crucified Jesus watching the brutal infliction of pain on an immaculate body, the body of her son, formed exclusively from her very tender and stainless flesh. "But standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and..." Was this a divine ordeal for Mary that she should see this cruel shedding of Blood from a body which she conceived with her surrendering answer to the divine command, years ago, when the angel Gabriel brought her the glad tiding of the birth of Jesus? Is this the grand finale of that glad tiding? The world was perhaps in the thickest moment of its darkness and Mary stood there with no flame of light from reason, but completely relying on an almost invisible ray of faith, which was strong, stronger than any amount of rational proofs and scientific verifications. Faith shines in the darkest moments of our life, and the very shining becomes invisible to a thinking mind. To the logic of reason and to the vision of eyes everything crumbles and falls into the abyss of nothingness, to utter meaninglessness, unrhythm and chaos. Yet faith can shine forth, may be getting stronger, though the person involved does not understand it.

"But standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and...". Mary did not utter a word. What do words mean in such a situation! Words are supposed to unveil sense or meaning hidden in the

mind. But what could Mary, harbour in her mind! The Real has fallen into the depth of senselessness. Mary stood there all alone, amidst thick darkness and the annihilating fall of all. Void, stripped off all realities, only remained, devouring everything into its abysmal emptiness. Yes, encircled by cries of chaos, Mary stood there in her Zero hour, when everything failed, when heaven and earth together kept silence and retired from the scene all together, leaving Mary and John at the foot of the cross, 'surrounded by wolves' (Ps. 22:16) ready to devour the flesh that is being torn into pieces. The agonizing pain of Mary was very crucial.

Agony, though alarming can also bear positive fruits. "When a woman is in travail she has sorrow, because her hour has come; but when she is delivered of the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a child is born into the world" (Jn. 16:21). Typically, reminding us of this truth, her divine son gave a parting message to his mother. Looking at John, his own disciple, Jesus said: "Woman, here is your son". Jesus addresses Mary a couple of times by the general noun 'Woman' instead of mother. This exceptional addressing is perhaps to denote a special roll Mary is playing in the name of womanhood, representing the new Eve co-operating with the sacrificial offering of the new Adam. The same addressing was there when Mary



requested Jesus to perform his first miracle. The new Eve now enters into the story of Jesus at the crucial moment of the beginning of his public ministry, which eventually leads him to his death on the cross. Mary, born without sin, representing all womanhood, offers the reconciliatory sacrifice with Jesus. In the ancient Hindu custom the wife of the priest stands by the priest as a co-offerer of the sacrifice for reconciliation (*saha-dharmini*). In the case of Jesus, the high priest, it is Mary, his Mother, who plays this role in a unique way because the victim offered is her own only son.

Mary accepted John as her son. In accepting John Mary also accepted all members of humanity, conceived in the form of Christ, as her sons and daughters. It is to be remembered that this acceptance of her universal motherhood takes place at a moment of agonizing pain. What is received in pain and with painful surrender is certainly precious and Mary considers this motherhood as a dear privilege and takes care of all her children on the earth with great love and concern.

Though it was not yet dusk, the clouds above the Mount Calvary were dark. Not a ray of light passed through them. Left in darkness, stillness and silence, Mary contemplated the dying Jesus, the sacrificial lamb that one-day represented the

only son of Abraham (Gen. 22:13). This happened when the salvation story of Israel was confirmed, founded on the unwavering faith of Abraham (Heb. 11:8-12). The lamb symbolized Jesus and is now being sacrificed along with the surrendering faith of Mary. Thus Mary confirms and completes the sacrificial offering of Abraham and silently inaugurates the new era of salvation through the death of her only son on the cross.

The Christian tradition also keeps a long cherished memorial that the bleeding body of Jesus was laid down on the lap of Mary for her final contemplative look. Holding the sinless body of Jesus, wounded for the sins of the world, Mary once more gazed at "the mighty hand and the outstretched arm" (Eze. 20:34) with which the Lord of the universe will gather his people out of the countries where they are scattered. Watching the appalling misery of these mighty arms on Mary's lap even the marble of Italy melted like wax and gave shape to a unique masterpiece of art of all times, the *Pieta*. In this work of art Michelangelo replaces the hardness of stone by the tenderness of two human bodies, sad and stainless, as he carved out the exquisite expression of Mary's sorrowful look of her parting son, bruised, yet not vanquished; dead, yet not lost.

True contemplation is not understanding, but wonder and what we wonder at, we welcome into our hearts. May Mary, our dear Mother, lead us into contemplative wonder and keep us in her heart, a safe haven for all of us.

## CONCLUDING MELODY

## The Lady Prayer My Comrade Dear\*

To her disciples a living well  
*Her I met in commanding spell*  
*Yonder there on Carmel Hill*  
*Where nature blooms and beauties dwell.*

*Dressed in silver, draped in silence*  
*Her eyes glowing in His presence*  
*Meditating and mediating for me*  
*There she stays in lovely brilliance.*

*Her crowned head slightly bent,*  
*She prays and prays to the Omnipresent*  
*Unquavering, peaceful and still*  
*As Mira, as Clara in Assisi's tent.*

*On a lovely mount one dusk of day*  
*I saw her, pondering on potter's clay*  
*Fresh as a lily blossomed new*  
*In a flowery meadow where children play.*

\* Originally published in Dharmaram Annual, 1984-1985.

*Given to tapas, search and Depth,  
Seeking in stillness what is worth  
Her I found as Heaven's daughter  
Trying to transcend all on earth.*

*Yet involved is she, inward she speaks,  
Human in all, though Divine she seeks,  
Feeling the tensions, trials and throbs,  
Searching His steps who is humble and meek.*

*Once she entered into my life  
She changed my being, stilled my strife  
Wonder she works; whence the power?  
The secret of prayer or penance alive?*

*As we fly on time's wings  
Hymns of Heaven ever she sings:  
"Up above, beyond the star-lit skies  
Fix your gaze, to none you cling."*

*She raises me up when I fall  
Allows me never to feel very small  
A constant spring-board to rise again  
Ever reminds me of my genuine call.*

*She is nice, gentle and wise  
To my endeavour the God-given prize  
Distant though, near she lives  
A constant flavour, in all a spice.*

*The birds of Carmel sang their song  
And the mountains too in melodies long:  
"It's He, it's he who gave you her  
The One Who saved the world from wrong."*

*"Take His cross, your lives' pains  
Follow His path, creation's veins  
Live, love and help each other;  
All will pass, but He remains."*

*"United in Him your life entire,  
To Him subdued all your desire  
Arm in arm, you march with her  
To the Gates of Heaven that all aspire."*

*There, in the End, where glories shine  
When Banquet is ready with Bread and Wine  
May she take you, His chosen friend  
To dine with Him the Meal Divine."*

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**Endnotes:**

**Chapter I**

<sup>1</sup> *Mund. Up.* III.2.9.

<sup>2</sup> *Brhd. Up.* II.5.1,5.

<sup>3</sup> *Brhd. Up.* II.5.13.

<sup>4</sup> *Bhagavad Gita*, II.30.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

## Chapter II

<sup>6</sup> *Katha Upanishad* III. 12.15.

## Chapter VI

<sup>7</sup> How senses are to be silenced is not treated here. If interested, cfr. V.F. Vineeth, *Yoga of Spirituality* (Bangalore: Vidyavanam Publication, 1995), pp. 119-130.

<sup>8</sup> *Yogasutra*, 1:2.

<sup>9</sup> *Bhagavad Gita*. 2.53.

<sup>10</sup> *Katha Upanishad*. I.2.23 (S. Radhakrishnan's ed.).

<sup>11</sup> *Surya Upanishad*. 1.15 (R. Panikkar's ed. in *The Vedic Experience*).

## Chapter VII

<sup>12</sup> The word *Brahman* originally, in the *RgVeda*, meant the 'spell' or the 'word'. Later, in the *Upanisads*, *Brahman* meant the Absolute, the eternal source of all meaning and truth. *Nadabrahman* literally means the Divine Spell, the primordial Word emerging from the Absolute.

<sup>13</sup> *The Bhagavad Gita*, XI.18.

<sup>14</sup> In his classical work *Yogasutra*, Patanjali defines *yoga* as *Cittavrtti-nirodha*: stoppage of all the activities of the mind (*Yogasutra*, 1.2).

<sup>15</sup> Cf. John of the Cross, *The Dark Night of the soul*, Bk.1, Ch. 10, No.4:

The attitude necessary in the night of sense is to pay no attention to discursive meditation, since this is not the time for it. They should allow the soul to remain in rest and quietude, even though it may seem very obvious to them that they are doing nothing and wasting time, and even though they think this disinclination to think about anything is due to their laxity. Through patience and perseverance in prayer, they will be doing a great deal

without activity on their part. All that is required of them here is freedom of soul, that they liberate themselves from the impediment and fatigue of ideas and thoughts and care not about thinking and meditating. They must be content simply with a loving and peaceful attentiveness to God, and live without the concern, without the effort, and without the desire to taste or feel Him. All these desires disquiet the soul and distract it from the peaceful quiet and sweet idleness of the contemplation, which is being communicated to it.

<sup>16</sup> The Sanskrit word *Samadhi* (*Sama+dhi*) literally means equal-mind. Hence, is translated as equanimity. Indian religious scriptures extol this high spirit of equanimity or divine serenity in a holy person.

<sup>17</sup> *Bhagavadgita*, 14.24-25.

<sup>18</sup> Theosis is an expression the ancient Oriental Fathers of the Church had used to describe the divine transformation that took place in them through the work of the Holy Spirit. The expression reminds us of the Indian ideal of *brahmasaksatkara*, realization of Brahman in one's own self, strongly fostered in classical Hinduism, another great religion from the East.

### Chapter VIII

<sup>19</sup> Chandogya Up. VI, 12-14

<sup>20</sup> John of the Cross, *The Ascent to Mount Carmel*, Introduction, cfr. also Bk.1, Ch. 2, No. 4

<sup>21</sup> Teresa of Avila, *The Book of Her Life*, Collected works, Vol. 1, trans. by Kieran Kavanaugh, OCD and Otilio Rodrigues, OCD, Carmel International Publishing House, Trivandrum, India, 2001, p. 108.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 109.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119.



