

8 A DISCOURSE ON PRAYER



I am glad that you all want me to speak to you on the meaning of, and the necessity for prayers. I believe that prayer is the very soul and **essence** of religion, and, therefore, prayer must be the very core of the life of man, for no man can live without religion. There are some who in the **egotism** of their reason declare that they have nothing to do with religion. But it is like a man saying that he breathes but that he has no nose. Whether by reason or by instinct, or by **superstition**, man acknowledges some sort of relationship with the divine. The rankest **agnostic** or **atheist** does acknowledge the need of moral principle, and associates something good with its observance and something bad with its non-observance.

Now, I come to the next thing, viz. that prayer is the very core of man's life, as it is the most vital part of religion. Prayer is either petitional, or, in its wider sense, is inward communion. Even when it is petitional, the petition should be for the cleansing and purification of the soul, for freeing it from the layers of ignorance and darkness that envelop it. He, therefore, who hungers for the awakening of the divine in him must fall back on prayer. But, prayer, is no mere exercise of words or of the ears, it is no mere repetition of empty formula. Any amount of repetition of Ramanama is **futile**, if it fails to stir the soul. It is better in prayer to have a heart without words, than words without a heart. And I am giving you a bit of my experience, and that of my companions when I say, that he who has experienced the magic of prayer, may do without food for days together, but not a single moment without prayer. For, without prayer there is no inward peace.

If that is the case, someone will say we should be offering our prayer every minute of our lives. There is no doubt about it. But we erring **mortals**, who find it difficult to retire within ourselves for inward communion even for a single moment, will find it impossible, to remain perpetually in communion with the Divine. We, therefore, fix some hours when we make a serious effort to throw off the attachments of the world for a while, we make a serious **endeavour** to remain, so to say, out-of the

flesh.

I have talked of the necessity for prayer, and I have dealt with the essence of prayer. We are born to serve our fellow men, and we cannot properly do so unless we are wide awake. There is an external struggle raging in man's breast between the powers of darkness and of light, and he, who has not the sheet anchor of prayer to **rely upon**, will be a victim to the powers of darkness. The man of prayer will be at peace with himself and with the whole world; the man who goes about the affairs of the world, without a prayerful heart, will be miserable and will make the world also miserable. Apart, therefore, from its bearing on man's condition after death, prayer has **incalculable** value for man in this world of living. We, inmates of the Ashrama, who come here in search of Truth and for insistence on Truth, professed to believe in the efficacy of prayer, but had never upto now made it a matter of vital concern. We did not bestow on it the care that we did on other matters. I awoke from my **slumber** one day and realized that I had been woefully negligent of my duty in the matter. I have, therefore suggested a measure of stern discipline, and far from being any the worse, I hope, we are the better for it. For, it is so obvious. Take care of yourself and the things will take care of themselves. **Rectify** one angle of square and the other angles will be automatically right.

Begin, therefore, your day with prayer and make it so soulful that it may remain with you until the evening. Close the day with prayer, so that you may have a peaceful night free from dreams and **nightmares**. Do not worry about the form of prayer. Let it be any form; it should be such as can put us in communion with the Divine.

All things in the universe, including the sun, and the moon and the stars, obey certain laws. Without the restraining influence of these laws, the world will not go on for a single moment. You, whose mission in life is service of your fellow men, will go to pieces if you do not impose on yourselves some sort of discipline, and prayer is a necessary spiritual discipline. It is discipline and restraints that separate us from the brute.

- M.K. Gandhi

About the Author:

Mahatma Gandhi, the father of our nation was born on Oct 2,1869 at

Porbandar, Gujrat. He was a pre-eminent leader of Indian national movement in British ruled India. Gandhiji dedicated his life to the discovering of 'truth' or 'satya' and led the path of non-violence in the political field. He practised the principles of truth and non-violence not only in his personal life but applied them in political field also. His famous autobiography is *My Experiments with Truth*. He is also called Bapu in India.

About the Text:

The present extract is from Gandhiji's lecture on the necessity of Prayer which he delivered to a group of students at Sabarmati Ashrama. The author highlights the need of purity of mind and heart which may be obtained through sincere prayers. The faith in religion teaches us a sense of discipline and duty.

GLOSSARY

| | | |
|--------------------|---|---|
| discourse (n) | : | talk, speech |
| conference (n) | : | a meeting at which formal discussions take place. |
| essence (n) | : | gist, central and important characteristic of something |
| egotism (n) | : | state of reflection of one's ego |
| superstition (n) | : | belief in magic, ghosts, devils, fairies etc. |
| agnostic (n) | : | one who believes that it is not possible to say surely whether or not there is God. |
| atheist (n) | : | one who does not believe in God |
| futile (adj) | : | useless |
| mortals (n) | : | human, being temporal, fatal, one who has necessarily to die. |
| endeavour (n) | : | attempt, effort |
| to rely upon (phr) | : | to trust on some one |
| incalculable (adj) | : | that cannot be calculated |
| insistence (adj) | : | emphasis |
| slumber (n) | : | sleep |
| rectify (v) | : | to correct, reform |
| nightmares(n) | : | horrible, dreams |

restraining : curbing, checking

brute (n) : animal

ACTIVITY-1 COMPREHENSION

A. Choose the correct alternative:

1. The lesson is about:-
 - (a) the necessity of religion
 - (b) the necessity of prayer
 - (c) the need for physical requirements
 - (d) None of the above []
2. In a 'better prayer' according to Gandhi ji, one should have:-
 - (a) a heart without words
 - (b) words without a heart
 - (c) neither words nor heart
 - (d) both words and heart []
3. Which, according to Gandhiji, is the greatest prayer for human beings?
 - (a) meditation
 - (b) worshipping god
 - (c) service of mankind
 - (d) abiding by religion

B. Say whether the following statements are True or False:

1. Prayer is the essence of religion []
2. Atheist also acknowledges the need for moral principle. []
3. Prayer is mere exercise of words or of the ears. []
4. Prayer does not bring any inward peace. []
5. For true prayer and communion with the divine one has to make serious efforts to throw off the attachments of the world for a while. []
6. There are no laws which can control the Universe []
7. It is discipline and restraints that separate us from animals. []

C. Answer the following questions in about 30-40 words each :

1. Where was this lecture delivered by Gandhiji?

2. Who constituted audience of this lecture?
3. What was the central idea of the speech?
4. Why should prayer be the essence of human life in Gandhiji's opinion?
5. What types of prayer does Gandhiji describe in this lecture?
6. Do you think that prayer brings discipline in life?
7. What should be the mission of a human being in life?

D. Answer the following questions in about 60 words each:

1. How does prayer purify one's soul ?
2. Gandhiji says "it is better in prayer to have a heart without words, than words without a heart". Explain.
3. What do you understand by Gandhiji's statement "Rectify one angle of square and the other angles will be automatically right"?
4. What do you mean by 'Spiritual discipline' and how can it be achieved?

ACTIVITY2: VOCABULARY

A. Match the words in Column 'A' with the words of their meanings in column 'B' and also use them in your own sentences as given in the example below:

Example : Discourse = speech

Gandhiji gave a discourse on prayer to the students in Sabarmati Ashrama.

| A | B |
|------------------|------------------------------------|
| (i) efficacy | sleep |
| (ii) egotism | shake |
| (iii) vital | holding back |
| (iv) slumber | practice of talking about one self |
| (v) stir | supreme |
| (vi) restraining | producing the desired results |

B. Give one word for each of the following:

- (a) One who does not believe in God.
- (b) One who thinks that nothing can be known about God.

- (c) Something that is of, from or like God.
- (d) Practice of belief in magic, whichcraft etc. without any solid reason.
- (e) A horrible dream

C. Fill in the blanks with appropriate forms of the words given in brackets:

- (i) Prayer is either..... (petition) or in its wider sense, is inward(commune).
- (ii) Man without a prayful heart will be..... (misery) and will also make the world so.
- (iii) The author has emphasized the need of.....(religion) devotion because it develops self discipline and duty.
- (iv) Without the (restraint) influence of laws the world will not run for a single moment.

ACTIVITY 3: GRAMMAR

Clauses

In English grammar, clauses and phrases are often mistaken. There are three types of clauses - Noun clause, Adjective clause, and Adverb clause. Similarly, there are three types of phrases - Noun phrase, Adjective phrase and Adverb phrase. While phrases are only groups of words, separately standing for nouns, adjectives or adverbs, clauses have grammatical structures of their own, having subjects and predicates, giving a look of separate sentences, though they are not independent sentences ; they are only parts of the sentences. Phrases do not have units like subjects and predicates. Note below how the words in italics, showing difference between clauses and phrases :

1. We hope *to win the match*. (noun phrase)
2. We hope *that we shall win the match*. (noun clause)
3. The tiger *with white stripes* is from Africa. (adjective phrase)
4. The tiger *which has white stripes* is from Africa. (adjective clause)
5. They arrived *at night*. (adverb phrase)
6. They arrived *when the night fell*. (adverb clause)

EXERCISE

Complete the following sentences by using phrases and clauses as directed:

1. He believes to _____ the examination. (noun phrase)
2. He believes that _____ the examination. (noun-clause)
3. The dress with _____ is costly. (adj. phrase)
4. The dress which _____ is costly. (adj. clause)
5. She lives near a _____. (adv. phrase)
6. She lives where a _____. (adv. clause)
7. I know how to _____. (noun phrase)
8. I know that _____. (noun clause)
9. The man with the big moustache _____. (adj. phrase)
10. The man who _____. (adj. clause)

ACTIVITY 4: SPEECH ACTIVITY

Divide your class into groups and ask each group member to deliver a speech on the necessity of Prayer.

ACTIVITY 5: COMPOSITION

Write a paragraph in about 150 words regarding the contribution of Mahatma Gandhi in National Freedom Movement.