

# The Problem with Prayer

Ram (James Swartz)

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Dear Ram My *sadhana* has been very intense lately and I'm sure it has to do with meeting you. I wish we had been able to spend more time together. Our meetings were so important and you gave me so much that I'm a little overwhelmed by it all. I think I agreed with ninety nine percent of what you said but there is one issue that caused doubt. I remember you saying once in Tiruvannamalai that prayer was useless or something to that effect. I wonder if I heard it correctly because if I did I don't agree. I've found it very helpful. Would you mind saying a few words about it?

Ram: I think you misunderstood me about the prayer issue. Prayer is very valuable and I encourage it one hundred percent. It integrates the mind and programs the subconscious with a positive message. At your stage you should definitely pray. . . the more the better. Always pray for freedom and understanding and growth.

There are two issues concerning prayer that need to be understood at some time for anyone on the spiritual path, however. The first is a practical issue and concerns karma. People believe that if they just pray for something that God should give it to them. But the problem with this idea is that God actually has no day to day control over the karma world. I know this sound ridiculous because God is omnipotent. If He or She is omnipotent then He or She should be able to override the law of karma and make anything happen. . . even things that are against the laws of nature that God created in the first place. But God has ceded direct control of the apportionment of results to the law of karma. Why? Because the results of actions need to be impersonally decided by the actions themselves and the actions and the nature of the field in which the actions are taking place. And why does it need to be this way? Because the creation would become an unlivable chaos if the cosmic order that makes purposeful action possible was continually changed at the request of individuals in it.

Let's say that you pray that God make water dry or sugar sour or fire cold and God answers your prayer. Can you imagine what life would be like? Or let's say you want a man to love you and you pray to God that this man will love you. At the same time another woman who is equally devoted to God wants the same man. While all these prayers are going on the man in question. . . who is equally religious. . . prays that God make a third woman love him and asks that you and the other woman stop calling him. And let's say that the third woman is a lesbian, is secretly in love with you and is praying full time that you be open to her love. What can God do? God loves all His/Her children equally.

God is not a big powerful willful human being in the sky that is personally involved in the anxieties of each of His or Her creatures. Considering the dualistic nature of the creation and the simple fact that good people appear on opposite sides of every issue, how can He/She play favorites? The Palestinians pray for the eradication of the Jews and the Jew pray for the eradication of the Palestinians.

So to handle all these conflicting desires God refers all such prayers to the Karma Machine which He/She invented. All desires for the goods of this world stay in the karma world and the outcome of these desires depends not on anyone's wish but on the appropriateness and

timeliness of the actions that all parties do to get what they want. In this case it seems highly unlikely that anyone will be satisfied. So praying for God to give you things that are in the karma world is not really the way to go.

Knowing that your fate is in good hands may calm your mind while you wait for the result you want but at the same time you had better be prepared to accept a result you do not want as God's will because the question is not up to God directly. Yes, God is indirectly responsible for delivering the fruits of action. . . like the sun is ultimately responsible for life on earth. But, like the sun, in whose light all actions, good and evil, take place God is simply the witness. The results are left to the Karma Machine that God has put in place to deal with the conflicts that are inherent in the nature of duality.

If you pray to see God or know God then your prayers can be answered because no karma is involved. . . it is just between you and God, your own Self. And since you and God have the same identity, it can be revealed to you.

Another problem with the praying for 'stuff' issue is this: the things that one can gain in the karma world are in a state of constant decay. The moment you get this man's love, that love starts to change. This is exactly what happened with you and Michael. So God would only be setting you up for a lot of anxiety and disappointment if he gave you what you wanted. What kind of God would do that? There is a nice saying from the Course in Miracles, "From what you want, God won't save you."

And finally, very often when you get what you prayed for you realize that you didn't actually want it and you then start praying to God to get rid of what you have been given. If God satisfied your prayer would He/She be doing you a favor? Not at all. God would only be encouraging confusion. And confusion is not a state of mind that benefits anyone.

The second issue is more subtle. It involves the deeper reason that people pray. We are not talking about prayer as worship. Worship means that you don't want anything from God, only that you appreciate His/Her presence in your life and you stream your love and appreciation to your symbol of God. Prayer to symbols like Jesus or Ganesh does not stick to the symbol but goes right on to God, your innermost Awareness. So you benefit from worship; you cultivate a grateful happy state of mind.

In any case, why do I pray? Because I want something. But it so happens that what people think they want is not really what they really want ; a deeper hidden need is operating. What do I really want when I ask for something in the karma world? I want to be free of my sense of limitation. I want freedom from fear. I want freedom from desire. I want to feel whole and complete. If I were free of my fears and desires I wouldn't need to pray at all. So this is a good desire. Who doesn't want to be free of fear and desire?

But there is also a problem with using prayer to solve this problem. . . because I am already whole and complete. I am already beyond fear. I am already free. So by praying without understanding who I am I reinforce the belief that something is missing, that I am incomplete. . . rather than remove it. Wise people don't pray because they know they already have what they might pray for. If I pray for a relationship I am praying that I want someone to love me or that I want someone to love. This is foolish because my nature is love. By asking for love I'm saying

that I don't have love. Why would I want someone to love me when I can do the job better than anyone? So prayer can be an obstacle to enlightenment. I say keep on praying but think about what you are praying for and why. If it makes you feel good keep it up. I prayed a lot when I was doing my *sadhana* but one day I realized that I was just praying to myself and the prayers ended.

The most effective prayer is this: please reveal yourself to me, O Lord. What happens to this prayer? Does it go off into Heaven to be considered by God? It does not. Since God is your innermost Self, your Awareness, it stays right there with you and serves notice to the part of you that is God that the part of you that thinks it isn't God wants to wake up. If you keep up this prayer, if it becomes the most burning wish of your heart, you will wake up! There is no doubt about this. God will reveal Itself to you in whatever way is appropriate. It will send you experiences that convince you that you are God. It will send you a teacher that will reveal God to you. It will direct your mind to scriptures that reveal God. It will happen. If you want to remain a child spiritually then ask God for God's stuff. If you want to attain your full spiritual potential ask for God and God alone. You will not be disappointed.

Anyway, it was so nice to hear from you Tanya. I'm sorry I'm a bit slow replying but there were quite a few emails in the cue when yours came in and I have to be fair to everyone. I wish you good luck in your new life. . . I'm sure things will work out nicely. Please write anytime.

Much love to you, Ram