

Prayer or Supplication

Series 3, Chapter 5

From:

Philosophy of the Masters

(Gurmat Sidhant)

By

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Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find;
knock and the door will be opened to you.
For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds;
and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

(Jesus Christ)

St. Mathew 7:7,8



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Prayer or Supplication

What is supplication?

Prayer is called in Persian, 'Dua', which means to call. It means calling on the Lord or some other person for help.

A materialist considers this life to be a machine, the parts of which are being run by the blind forces of cause and effect, and he does not admit that there is an Ultimate Being who is directing it. But one who knows the reality, while agreeing that the law of cause and effect is working, further knows that this is being done under the orders and directions of a Supreme Being. He, therefore, while keeping an eye on the causes-and their effects, appeals to the Lord, the Supreme Cause, for help.

The Helplessness of the Materialist

We find that a materialist, while possessing all means and materials, does not reach the ultimate objectives he desires. All his material possessions do not enable him to do so. He then becomes helpless. He perceives no ray of hope in the darkness of his failure. He does not like anything. His life becomes a burden to him. He feels no interest in life and in his despair he may commit suicide. He lives like a corpse devoid of life. As compared with this, a person who knows the reality makes an effort to gain worldly wealth, but knowing that the Lord is the ultimate Cause of all causes, leaves the fruits to Him and surrenders gladly to His Will and pleasure. The Lord may do whatever is good for him, for it is only the Lord who knows what is good for us. If the result is in accordance with his wishes, he is thankful. If it is to the contrary, he submits to it cheerfully, because he knows that whatever is happening is in accordance with the order and will of the Lord. He asks for the Lord's help at every step, because he knows that there is always something that is beyond the reach of his own efforts. Crying for help in this way is called prayer.

In reality, prayer is the gathering and stilling of the waves of the mind at the inner center. When some desire springs up in the mind or one is worried by some worldly affliction, he thinks in his heart of the power of the Lord and looks to Him for inspiration. The heart of man is the dwelling place of the Lord. The Lord is the great storehouse of power. He is the true and complete ideal. By contemplating on Him a man gains peace within himself and becomes powerful. When he gets this power, he is able to think of ways of getting out of his troubles. The mind gets power to put forth effort. By offering prayers, the mind gets one-pointed. A patience-giving current of thoughts is generated which makes a man alert and active. He develops habits of patience, contentment and forbearance, and acquires courage and strength with which to face difficulties. These are the fruits of prayer.

The wise know that there is great strength in the soul of man. The mind is related to the soul. Therefore, when the waves of the mind are stilled, they come under the influence of the soul and gain strength from it. The soul is conscious and powerful, since it is a particle of the Lord. The Lord permeates it. Man considers himself to be limited and feeble, and it is indeed true that one becomes what he thinks himself to be. But the soul is a particle of the Lord, and the Lord is infinite. If the particle thinks of the infinite for some time, it finds itself to be infinite.

“You are a particle of the infinite, and if you think of the infinite for some time you will become infinite.”

When the soul is connected with the Lord, it receives infinite strength from His Current of Powers. Although you are finite, there is a power within you which is infinite. This is the Lord Himself. On understanding this, one begins to understand the reality of the fact that the soul and the Lord are one. The soul takes the dye of the Lord and becomes one with Him.

“The Father and son are dyed in the same hue.” (Bhairo M5, 1161-15)

“I and my Father are one.” (Bible)

Those with true intelligence go inside and pray. They then get benefit from the Merciful Current of the Lord. Those of lesser wisdom worship symbols or go to mosques or temples where there are idols, and pray before them. There are those who know the spiritual regions and go inside and get direct help through the mind, while there are others who go to certain holy places such as rivers and so forth, and pray there. All of them get results according to the one-pointedness of their mind and faith. No such action is without results.

Some deny the existence of God, and do not think it proper to offer prayers. The Lord is invisible and unseeable. He cannot be seen by the senses. But He permeates our soul. He is not separate from us, whether we believe in Him or not. He is the soul of our souls. He sustains them. He is in truth one – Mahatmas call Him by various names.

We have already said that prayer can be described as the stilling of one's inner feelings at the mind center. In this are included detachment and practice, knowledge and contemplation and worship and recitation.

Prayer is a Universal Feeling

Prayer is a universal feeling, which a person feels when discomforts, trouble, disease, danger or calamity visits him and he wishes to avoid these things; or when he wishes to satisfy some bodily need or obtain spiritual gain; or when he wants strength to face some difficulties because he does not find sufficient power in himself; or when he wants the help of a powerful being. We see every day that we are often obliged to ask some stronger or more capable person to help us. When a student cannot solve a problem, he seeks the aid of his teacher. Similarly, in the case of illness, we ask a physician to treat us. A subordinate asks his officer to help him. These are examples of a kind of prayer.

When we face any difficulty or an enemy pursues us and we find no refuge, we ask for help from the powerful Lord of the universe or from persons in whom He is manifest. This is called prayer.

It is natural to ask a more powerful or more able person to help us, and it is all the more natural to turn for help to that Supreme Power who is the Lord of all regions and universes and is their Creator, or to one who is one with Him. The fact is that we cannot help praying to Him.

How prayer should be offered so that it may be acceptable to the Lord and to the Master, is the next point to be considered. All the religions say that supplication to the Lord or to the Master is the way to obtain Grace of every kind. It is only through prayer that spiritual advancement can

be achieved. Prayer is the most natural, direct and easy means of connecting individuals with the Creator, and connecting the slave with the Lord. Every seeker needs prayer from the beginning to the end, until he realizes the Lord and merges in Him. Through prayer, all bodily, religious, national and social needs are fulfilled. The ailments of mind and body are eliminated, and prayer ultimately becomes the means of bringing about the union of the soul with the Lord. By the Grace of the Lord, the mind, which is like a crow that eats filth or a crane that eats fish, becomes pure like a swan.

“Whether you are a swan, a crow or a crane, only His Mercy is of any avail. If He so wills it, He turns a crow into a swan.” (Sri Rag War M1, 91-4)

Do Not Extend Your Hand in Supplication Before Anyone Other Than the Lord and the Master

He is the Creator and Lord of the Universe. All other powers are sustained by Him. He is the Supreme Power of all powers. Whatever you wish to ask, ask it of the Lord. There is no dearth of anything in His Court. Kabir Sahib says, *“Nothing is wanting in His court.”*

Guru Arjan Sahib also says that when his kind Friend pervades everything and is everywhere present, how can His servant be in need of anything?

“He whose Friend is present everywhere what can such a person want?” (Gauri M5, 186-8)

All the gods and goddesses and lower powers draw their strength from Him. All depend on Him. If you have to ask for anything, pray to Him. Why ask of the servants? Man can be true – the Khalsa (Pure Being) – only when he does not look to anybody else. Guru Gobind Singh Ji says:

“One who, with the flame burning brightly, meditates in his mind on the One without thinking of another; one who is filled and adorned with complete love and affection and does not believe in fasting or the grave or the tomb; one who recognizes only One and no other and does not indulge in pilgrimages, charity, kind acts, austerities and self-discipline - when the candle burns clearly inside him, then he is Khalsa or the pure one.”

Guru Arjan Sahib says, *“All is from the Lord, who is the chief giver and the dispeller of fear. Remember Him and make supplication to Him.”*

“Pray to the giver of joy and the dispeller of fear, to whom He is kind, his deeds bear fruit.”
(Sri Rag M5, 44)

“Praise the One and repeat His Name; remember the One, and keep the One in mind. Sing never-ending praises of the One, with body and mind meditate on the Lord, He is One and One alone. The only Lord pervades everywhere, the One has become many; by praying to the One sin departs; the One Lord pervades the body and the mind; by the Master's Grace Nanak knows that One.” (Gauri M5, 289-5)

Guru Ramdas says, *“If you have to perform any action, pray to the Lord. He will make it successful. The Master is our true friend, relation and helper.”*

“If you wish for success in any action, pray to the Lord. He accomplishes your task for you. The Master is the true witness. He is the dispeller of fear and is kind. He protects his servant.”
(War Sri Rag M5, 91-5)

Guru Arjan Sahib prays, *“O Lord! This body of mine is Yours. I pray humbly and earnestly before You. Everything is due to Your greatness. Otherwise nobody would even know my name.”*

“I pray to You, for the body and mind are Yours. Oh Nanak! It is all His greatness. Otherwise, nobody would know my name.” (Asa M5, 383-11)

The strength and refuge of the Saints is the Lord who is their Master. They pray to Him. There is no fixed place for their worship. They tell their joys and sorrows to Him alone.

“I am mad. You are my Master and I pray to Thee; I have no other place in which to pray to You; I can tell my joys and sorrows to You alone.” (Suhri M4, 735-1)

Always ask of the All-Powerful One. If you ask any other, you will find that he is already full of troubles and cannot give you any help.

“To whomsoever you may pray in this world, his hands are full of his own troubles. He who prays to the Transcendent One crosses the ocean of the world.” (Gujri M5, 497)

It is beneficial to pray to the All-Powerful One. There is no dearth of anything with Him. To ask of the lower powers or of the gods and goddesses does not lead to complete success. They can give us benefits or boons that are within their own sphere, but they cannot save us from death and rebirth. They are all involved in this lower cycle. They cannot give salvation. Guru Arjan Sahib says that he who prays to the Lord is free from all the three fevers and troubles, gets the wealth of happiness, and is saved from calamity.

“He removes the three fevers. He takes away troubles and gives peace. He who prays to the Lord meets with no obstructions.” (Todi M5, 714-12)

It is clearly written in the holy Quran that one should call upon the Lord only for help. Crying to the Lord is the true crying. Hazrat Ibrahim told his tribesmen, *“Go away. I leave you and all others except Allah to whom you pray. I cry to my Lord. I am confident that I will not be left without help when I cry to Him.”*

He again said, *“Oh followers of the book, turn your faces towards one who is your friend and mine. We should not pray to anyone except the Lord ‘Allah Talah’, and should regard none other as His equal.”* (Alamar Ayat 7-8)

We have as yet not seen the Lord, therefore we do not completely rely on Him and have faith in Him. When there is no complete faith, how can one's prayers be heard? But there is the Light of the Lord in the Master.

“He appears in the garb of a Holy Man.” (Mam M5, 1075- 7)

“The Lord speaks through him; the Lord resides in the heart of a Holy Man.” (M 5 263-4)

“His words are the words of the Lord, although they come from the throat of Abdullah.”
(Servant of God)

The words of the Master, although they come from the throat of a human being, are the words of the Lord. To ask of the Guru is to ask of the Lord. He is in every way powerful. If you wish to pray to Him who is able to give life or take it away, call upon Him who is the living God and have confidence and faith in Him. Do not turn to any earthly refuge. Turn your inner attention to Him. No thought of receiving help from anyone else should ever enter the mind. The attention should be directed to Him alone. Your cries for help will reach Him. Kabir Sahib says that if a disciple is on one side of the ocean and the Guru on the other, the disciple should turn his attention to the Master. The Master will then make all his efforts successful. The Master is the King of kings. Everything is within His power. He has the power to do everything. The world of kings bows at His door.

“He who is the Overlord of kings and chieftains, He in Whose power is the whole world, He who is the doer of all things, no one is beyond Him, pray to your Master, He will crown your efforts with success. He Whose court is the highest, He Whose name sustains the devotees, He Who pervades and owns all, He Whose glory is present in all minds, He by remembering whom death cannot harm, He by remembering whom dry land becomes green, He by remembering whom the drowning ones swim across, oh Nanak, He has heard my prayers. The Saints will have mercy on me and I will dwell in the Name.” (Gauri M5, 182)

He can give all the four boons, that is, dharam (righteousness), wealth, happiness and salvation. He has power to give all.

“He who wants the four cardinal boons, he should serve the Holy Men. He who wants to cast his woes away, he should sing the Name of the Lord in his heart. He who wants glory for himself, he should live with Holy Men and give up his ego. He who is afraid of death and rebirth, he should take shelter with the Saints.” (Gauri M5, 266-4)

If you go to the door of the Lord or the Master, go as a beggar. There is no one else before whom one should bow. He is the only one who can listen to the prayer of one who is caught in the whirlpool of Maya. He is the only one who can put healing ointment on the heart that is bleeding from attachment and greed. It is only He who can revive lost hopes. All these qualities exist only in the Lord, or in His other form, the Master. He heals bleeding hearts by sending them the Current of His Inner-Consciousness. Bhai Nand Lai Sahib says:

“The Perfect Master heals the heart, the healing is done in the heart.”

For this reason a disciple, whether near or far from his Master, should give up all intellectual cleverness, surrender his mind and body to Him, and place all his sufferings before Him.

“Whenever the heart is suffering pray to him; give up cleverness, and surrender body and mind.” (Gujri War M5, 519-11)

In the holy Quran it is said, *“Who else is there who would listen to the prayers of the helpless and afflicted and remove his troubles?”*

Jesus Christ says in the Epistle of St. John in the Bible: *“Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it to you.”* (St. John 14:23)

If you have to pray, pray to the Lord or to His manifested form the Master, who can give you all.

Pray to the Living Presence of the Lord

There can be no doubt that just like asking for help in worldly affairs from one who is powerful, the asking for aid from the Power who is the fountain of all powers and wealth, is a true and effective prayer. But to sigh while praying, considering Him to be separate from us is ignorance. He is a pure and infinite Being, but in His Mercy He dwells within and illumines our soul. Therefore to pray for help to that Power which is seated in our soul is the key to success. To pray to Him as a Being apart from us is not true prayer, for we are then praying to a Being whose existence we doubt, and there is still a feeling of egotism or separateness. Some doubt still persists as to whether or not we will receive His Grace, and there is not complete faith and confidence.

That Reality permeates our entire being, although we are not conscious of it, and the Current of Divine Power and Light is flowing inside us. When we turn within and merge in that power our soul-force awakens within us. Just as our hidden physical strength is awakened by physical exercise, similarly, in prayer we bring to the surface our inner feelings and emotions and through such prayer the soul awakens and we obtain spiritual benefits.

It sometimes happens that by praying to some power apart from ourselves our wishes are fulfilled due to self-intoxication induced by our heart-felt desires and feelings. But the illusion about the Lord being separate from us still persists. Our life is then not based on any firm foundation. We are not conscious of the treasure of powers and abilities that lies within us. Our soul is a particle of the Lord. He permeates our soul. By praying to Him and merging in Him one shares in His powers. But he who considers Him to be a separate being cannot enjoy this wonderful pleasure and the full benefits of merging in Him. Those who think that the Lord is on high and directs the affairs of the world from there seldom receive a response to their prayers. The Lord is with you and within you and not far away from you. The Lord is inside you. He is none other than the spirit of your soul. Pray to Him and praise Him inside, and ask for His help.

Prayer and Effort

Should effort be given up when praying? It should be remembered that until man becomes a conscious co-worker with and under His will, he should not give up effort. It is not the purpose of prayer or grace that you should make no effort, except to go on praying. This can be made clear by an illustration.

A boy is late for school. What would you think of him if he were to sit down and pray, "*Oh Lord! Let me not be late.*" It would be proper for the boy that, while praying, he should also rely on his own effort and should walk quickly in order to reduce the delay. In the first instance there would be more and more delay. We should take a lesson from one aspect of this illustration only. While making an effort, also extend the hands in prayer. This is the chief cause of success. A sincere desire for anything and a sincere effort for it is true prayer. This is praying in the right way.

All too often we pray with our lips and act otherwise. Such a prayer is not granted. When a man makes a sincere effort for something from his heart, that prayer issues from the very pores of his cells, even though he may not utter a syllable. Whenever necessity arises or a calamity comes, then make an effort with firmness and confidence and pray to the Lord to remove the defects due to imperfections and weakness in you.

It is said in the holy Quran that when Moses and Harun prayed for victory over the infidels and their men, they received the reply, *“I have accepted the prayer of both of you. You should now stand firm in your efforts and not follow the example of those who do not know the reality.”*

The prophet Moses told his people, *“Ask for help from the Lord and be firm. Do not lose courage in the face of calamity. Only he loses courage who has no refuge. The Lord and His human form, the Master, is your everlasting refuge. If in spite of effort you fail, take it to be His Will. If one loses while trying, take it to be His Will.”*

Which Prayer is Granted

“A devotee's prayer never goes in vain. A man's prayer is never wasted.” (Belawal M5, 819-11)

“Whatever the devotee asks of the Lord is granted. Whatever the devotee desires of the Lord is granted at once.” (Asa M5, 403-16)

“Whatever you ask of the Lord, He gives; oh Nanak, whatever a devotee says comes true.”
(Dhanasri M5, 681-19)

Guru Sahib says that the Lord, the Father, has ordained that whatever a child asks shall be granted.

“The Father has ordained that whatever a child asks shall be given to him.” (Malar M5, 1266)

In the Sura Momin of the holy Quran it is stated, *“Cry to me and your request will be granted.”* Again it is said in the Sura Baker, *“Oh Prophet: whenever any of my creatures asks you about me, tell him that I am with him; if he cries, I hear him and grant his request.”*

It is said in the Bible: *“What things so ever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.”* (St. Mark 11:24)

It is again stated: *“Ask and it shall be given you; seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened.”* (St. Mathew 7:7,8)

It is seen, however, that people ask for thousands of things and all of their prayers are not granted. Then what is the meaning of the above words? Let us see which kind of prayer is granted, and why every prayer cannot be granted.

The prayer that can redeem sinners and cure physical, mental and spiritual disease must be made with full faith in the Lord and the conviction that He is all-powerful. Our feelings which have not found utterance are not hidden from Him. He is cognizant of every feeling and thought. He knows the sufferings of both the good and the evil.

“He knows what is within the heart; He knows the sufferings of both the good and the bad.”
(Pat Chaupai 10)

The dwelling up of a strong desire is in reality the making of a prayer. If we should surrender our desires or acts to the Lord before expressing them, then there would be no obstacle in the way of success.

That prayer is right which is full of yearning and pangs. It should be made with patience and full confidence, and with a loving heart, in all humility and submission.

“Oh mind! Stand in awe of the Lord. However low, even the lowest of the low, He calls him to Him.” (Devghandhari M5, 529-8)

Prayers should be made according to the directions of the Master and in order to reform one's life. When you pray in this way, you express gratitude for favors received. Gratitude cannot be expressed by mere words that have no connection with our conduct. Since the Master is the Shabd and the Shabd is His form, He is in the Shabd. He who makes the Shabd a part of his life becomes dear and acceptable to the Master. He says, *“If you love me, do as I say.”*

“The words of the Master are words of bliss; they are Nectar itself.” (Kanara M4, 1311)

Christ said, *“If ye love me, keep my commandments.”* In order that the prayer may be acceptable, it is necessary that the disciple should be devoted to the Master and His words should dwell in the heart. He can then ask for anything and it will be given to him. Feel happy in remembering the Lord and he will fulfil your desires. Christ says:

“If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.” (St. John 15:7)

“Delight thyself also in the Lord; and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart.” (Psalm 37:4)

If you crave forgiveness for your sins, you should first forgive others and then pray. Christ says:

“When ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have aught against any; that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.” (St. Mark 11:25)

The situation is, therefore, that when we commit any bad act and ask forgiveness of the Lord, He then forgives us; but at the same time He warns us, *“Beware, go and do not do it again.”* Christ, when he forgave a woman for committing adultery, said, *“Go and sin no more.”*

A judge may reduce a sentence, but this does not mean that the criminal will become a better man. He may well do the same evil deeds again. But according to the spiritual law by which the Master forgives sin, he also tells the sinner to sin no more, so that he may turn away from sin and may be able to enter higher regions. What good can it do a man to cry if he goes on taking poison? It is very necessary for him to stop taking poison. How can prayer be of any help if there is no sincere aversion to doing sinful deeds?

Ceaseless effort to make our life pure and truthful is true prayer. This draws to us the Mercy of the Lord, and His Grace and limitless blessings then fulfil the sincere and pure desires of our heart. By merely asking of the Lord or the Master that we may love Him, we do not, as a matter of fact, begin to love Him. But if we consciously pray for a truthful and pure life and try to elevate our life, we will then be molded as He wills and will begin to realize His presence and to share His love.

To pray effectively, it is necessary that we should conduct our life as desired by the Master, and that we should experience happiness in the remembrance of the Lord. Our prayers should be in harmony with the Will of the Lord and the Master, and we should feel happy in whatever He

wills. A peculiarity of human life is the love that knows how to give, but not how to take. But one becomes entitled to all the powers of the Lord by loving Him. He benefits the world through them, but remains aloof from all. We have to love the Lord. It is His Will to give or not to give to us. Our duty is to remain happy in the sphere of His Will. It is, therefore, considered unbelief for the Saints to pray. Maulana Rumi says that Saints rejoice in the Will of the Lord. They consider it unbelief to pray, *“Oh Lord! Take away this suffering from me.”*

Intellectual and Logical Difficulties in Prayer

Many would like to know why we should pray when the Lord knows all our needs. A father, for example, takes care of the expenses of his family's food, clothing and education without being asked to do so. If we are to be given only after asking, then it seems possible that we might not be given something owing to our lack of knowledge or comprehension. It is also possible that we might ask for something which would be to our disadvantage. We know from experience that we sometimes pray for things and get them, but when they turn out to our disadvantage, we are sorry that we prayed for them. Just as a father knows what is good and essential for his child, similarly, our heavenly Father also knows what we really need and what will be to our advantage. Saints, knowing that the Lord knows our needs, advise us to pray with this in mind.

“Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of before ye ask Him.” (St. Mathew 6:8)

“Great is Your glory, for You know our innermost feelings.” (Asa 463)

“He knows the inner thoughts of all hearts; He knows the sufferings of the good and evil.”
(Sri Mukh Wak, Patshahi 10)

The Saints have given examples of short prayers for our guidance, and some of these are cited later. The purpose of these prayers is to help us to know our needs and to have them fulfilled. When we receive their fulfilment, we should be thankful. The Saints ask us to pray for the fulfilment of our desires as a child asks its mother with full confidence.

“We are children; You are our Father and Master; guide us.” (Asa M4, 450)

“We are ignorant and simple children; oh Father, instruct us.” (Kalyan M4, 1321-4)

Even if our prayer for the removal of a calamity may not be granted, it always happens that we get added strength to bear it and in this way we better realize our latent capacities. We sometimes think of ways and means by which these calamities and sufferings can be removed.

Internal Difficulties – The Heart’s Ground for Prayer

The Heart's Ground for Prayer: It is necessary to prepare the heart for praying. This consists of praying in humility and with reverence and devotion. Guru Angad Sahib says, *“The Lord knows all, and is the cause of all that happens. He has the power to fulfil our desires by Himself. Stand before Him and pray in all humility.”*

“He knows all; He can do everything Himself; oh Nanak! Stand before Him and beg humbly and earnestly.” (Maru M2, 1093-3)

Guru Arjan Sahib also enjoins praying with both hands folded.

“Pray with folded hands.” (Bkairav M5, 1152-6)

The second requirement for praying is that the wavering of the mind should be stilled and that the mind should be focused on some inner center and concentrated there again and again. Until the mind is stilled at some center, both the seekers and the followers of the inner path weep at the antics of the mind. When we withdraw our thoughts from the external world and try to focus them on a center in the invisible world, our pent-up thoughts and fears due to our sins in the past come to the surface of themselves. They should either be eliminated by calm and cool reasoning or removed by praying. The best way to remove these difficulties is to conjure up the form of the Master inside ourselves and to lose ourselves in contemplation of Him. It is this kind of constant contemplation which opens the way to the Lord and makes us fit for His Mercy.

In inner praying, a seeker sometimes meets with difficulties due to receiving no apparent response to his prayers. He may then begin to feel that there is no truth behind it. Not feeling the presence of the Lord, the seeker feels as if he is praying in a void. Some seekers rely on the fact that though they do not see the Lord, He sees them. But this state does not last for long. On closing the eyes, we see a vast expanse of darkness and see nothing beyond it. We take this silence as a response to our prayers. The senses cannot function in this silence, and the seeker feels in this state of unconsciousness that he has lost the way. He wishes to walk further on the strength of faith, but he falls again and again. It is a very delicate stage and requires the guidance of a Master. In addition, a certain amount of dryness enters our mind. It does not want to pray. If it is forcibly made to pray, the desire to do so fades away. A seeker has to spend a long time in this stage of dryness and darkness, and many a time his efforts prove fruitless and he does not find the abode of the Lord. These illusions of Maya and Kal mislead a seeker. The method of removing them is to be steady in contemplating on the inner image of the Master and in trying to achieve one-pointedness.

Three Methods of Prayer

Prayer is performed in three ways.

One is audible, in which we say prayers with our tongue. Ordinary people repeat certain prescribed passages from religious scriptures or recite prayers composed by some Saint. Some think that these are not very beneficial, since they represent the feelings of the Saints, while true prayer is an inner cry from the individual's own heart. Unless our prayer represents the inmost feelings of our heart, we do not derive benefit from it. Reciting other people's prayers is like wearing the clothes of others which do not fit us. The prayers of Saints and Holy Men serve us as a model in as much as similar feelings may arise in our own minds, and in this way the reciting of such prayers helps us.

The second method of praying is mental, in which the tongue does not come into play. In this kind of prayer, concentration is necessary. Before doing so, one feels the presence of the Lord who pervades everywhere, and prays for His help and becomes absorbed in His contemplation. While so absorbed, pray. For this, concentration is necessary. The mind should be withdrawn from everything outside and should be focused on the presence of the Lord or the Master. Then give vent to the feelings of your heart with devotion and gratitude; confess your weaknesses and ask for help. Open your heart to the Lord. For doing this successfully, patience and firm

determination are necessary. It cannot be done in a hurry. It is like learning to play a violin or some other instrument, which requires patience and determined practice.

In the beginning the mind does not take to it, but slowly and slowly, with remembrance of the Lord and contemplation of the Guru, the mind becomes still and success is achieved. When a seeker makes a little progress by means of audible and mental prayers, he should wait for a while for His Mercy and Grace.

When this practice is perfected, he will perceive, after praying, the flow of peace and bliss in his soul, and the mind will become joyful. After tasting this joy, the mind does not wander. These are signs of the descent of the Mercy of the Lord and the Master.

Ordinary people consider this to be all. A seeker, however, should be thankful and should all the more desire for union with the Lord. In such union a seeker rises above the bondage of the body and reaches the presence of the Lord and the Master, from whom all blessings originate. He then sees in operation, the invisible hands which cannot be described. The seeker feels that he is no longer in his body and that he has entered a new kingdom. He floats in spiritual regions and becomes a dweller in them in this very life. He sees the Lord face to face, and enjoys this supreme happiness.

Because of the power of the Lord's attraction the seeker's heart, mind and soul become dyed in the color of the Lord. This can be called mystical prayer, the third method. It has been described by many Saints who have experienced it. This kind of prayer can be found even today. But this kind of prayer can be achieved only through the special Mercy and Grace of the Lord. The effort of the seeker does not count. Such an experience, even for a moment, leads to faith in the Lord and the Master, and produces confidence in spiritual progress and experience. All sins, selfishness and fears vanish. We progress and become the recipients of the inner Grace of the Saints.

Praying Aloud

Does praying aloud affect us? Yes. It makes us serious for a time and elevates the thoughts. But if the matter is considered deeply, we will realize that when we do not know the Reality, praying loudly holds us back from preparing the spiritual ground, and the thought of gaining praise from others sometime enters our mind. There is danger of our becoming impostors by praying aloud. Such prayers, which contain no truth and do not come from the heart, are simply meant to please others. Physical sensations produce in us mental or emotional happiness and joy. If we were to make some spiritual progress, then we might gain some higher experience from such emotional happiness. But until we are acquainted with the secret of the soul, we cannot gain it. Human passions cannot influence the Lord. It is not necessary to cry loudly to enable our prayers to reach Him. He is not far off. His unseen ears are everywhere. He knows the secrets of every heart and mind, and He can fulfil every desire. Spiritual wealth cannot be gained by praying aloud. One should offer silent prayers with the tongue of the soul, and should pray that he may always act according to the Will of the Lord.

He dwells in every heart. He sees everything and knows our secret feelings. The Lord hears even the footfall of an ant. In the holy Quran it is commanded, *"In all humility cry silently to the Lord"*. It is again stated, *"There is no need to make any noise, for He hears everything."*

Guru Gobind Singh Sahib says:

“The trumpeting of the elephant reaches Him a moment later, but He hears the cry of an ant even sooner than that.” (Akal Astut)

There is no need for a seeker to utter loudly when praying. Even the silent current of his thought reaches the other side. The voice of thought is sufficient.

Praying in Public

In praying before the public we exaggerate our feelings. If we pray for a thing without desiring it in our heart of hearts, that is, if our head and heart do not wish earnestly for a thing, our prayer is nothing but a public and futile repetition of words. But if our prayers are sincere, and we wish for a thing from our heart, then the Lord, on hearing our prayer, grants it. Can the recital of prayers in public, which have no relation to the feelings of the heart, bear any fruit? Can the words we utter reach that omnipotent Lord more rapidly than our inner feelings? No, never. Audible prayers become mere formalities. They do not arouse our feelings, nor do we become absorbed in them. The prayers that spring from the heart of someone else cannot by repetition achieve their object unless they come from our hearts also. These prayers cannot be beneficial and cannot change our lives for good. The arrow which is shot without the bow being drawn to the breast cannot hit the target. Similarly, words which are not spoken from the heart do not reach the Lord. He knows our real needs even before we speak.

The Vedas, the holy Quran and other religious Scriptures, all insist on congregational prayers for the good of all. Can such prayers be of any benefit? Yes, certainly. If a number of persons offer prayers for the common good in humility and with sincere hearts, they get the Grace of the Lord and the prayers are never in vain. To wish for the common good is to live within the Will of the Lord. Many benefits come from it. It is a good way of keeping nations and societies awakened. It is customary amongst the Sikhs to offer common prayers. It is specially mentioned in their scriptures.

“Nanak, praised be the Name. May all prosper by Thy Will.”

The Gurus give examples of such prayers and these will be mentioned later. In Sura-i-al-i-Imran (a verse in the Quran) it is stated:

“Oh our Sustainer, keep us on the right path. Do not let our minds wander. Shower Thy Mercy on us. Surely, no one can exceed You in Grace.”

In the same Sura the following prayer occurs:

“Oh our Sustainer, forgive us for our lapses; overlook the excesses we have committed. Keep us steady on the right path, and give us victory over the forces of the infidels.”

What is the purpose of our offering such prayers? We pray in order to elevate ourselves, or to benefit the hearers, or to put before the Lord the sufferings and needs of all, or to tell the people of our devotion. The prayers of the last kind are useless.

There is a mention of such a specific prayer in Sura-i-Bakar. It says: *“Oh our Sustainer! If there has been any default or mistake on our part, do not take us to task; forgive us. Oh Lord! Do not place on us the restrictions and limitations which You imposed on those who preceded us. Oh Lord! Do not subject us to a burden we cannot bear. Oh God! Forgive and pardon us. Have mercy on us. You are our Lord and Master. Give us victory and success against the infidels.”*

Place of Worship

It is not necessary to offer prayer in a religious place. What is necessary is an inner urge only. Sufficient solitude is necessary so that there may be no obstruction or interference. It may be in the home or outside of it. Any place where solitude can be had is suitable. You can use your bedroom for the purpose. There may be religious books or pictures there to remind you of Holy Men whom you revere. If there is no room available, a particular portion of a room may be used. If this is not available, then any place such as a temple, satsang hall, mosque or church can be used. If this is not available, pray while walking alone, whether on the plains or in the hills, in a jungle or on the bank of a stream. Concentrate in the forehead, on the Lord or the Master, and place your inner feelings before Him. These places have some influence on prayers, but in reality no particular place or temple is required. All this world is the temple of the Lord.

“This world is the body of the Lord and He pervades it.” (Asa War M2, 463-13)

That place is holy where the Lord is remembered. All this earth is sacred. All places are fit for prayers. Alnusai said, *“For me the whole earth is a mosque and is sacred. Whenever the time of prayer arrives, my followers can say their prayers wherever they happen to be.”* The Lord is omnipresent. He created the entire universe, and He is its Lord. He does not dwell in man-made temples.

“God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that He is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands.” (The Acts 17:24)

Homes, jungles, waste lands, hills, rivers – wherever you bow to the Lord – is holy.

“All is holy where devotion kneels.” (O. W. Holmes)

All this creation is of the Lord. He dwells everywhere. It is not necessary, therefore, to turn your head in any particular direction while praying. The main thing is a firm conviction that the Lord is inside you. There should also be the conviction that we are responsible for our own actions. In the holy Quran it is said:

“Whether East or West, all belongs to the Lord. You may turn your head in any direction and you will face the Lord, for He is present everywhere.” (Sura Albakar 14-3)

It is further stated:

“There is no great benefit in turning your face in a particular direction. The true holiness lies in one's firm conviction in the Lord and the judgment day”. (Albakar 22-2 Quran)

The truly sacred place for praying is this body, within which dwells the Lord.

“This body is the temple of God, and the jewel of knowledge is to be found therein.”
(Parbhati M3, 1346-4)

“The body is the temple of the living God.” (Bible)

The heart is the mosque, and the body adorns it.

Go inside and pray to the Lord. It is not necessary to go anywhere else in order to pray. Search the Vedas and the Puranas and you will find that all say that He is residing in the heart.

“Oh, where am I to go when bliss is in my own house? My mind does not waver. It has become incapable of moving. Where I go, whether on land or sea, I see the Lord everywhere. The Vedas and Puranas were consulted; one should search Him there only if He is not here (in the heart).”
(Ramanand Basant, 1165-13)

That Beloved to whom we are to pray is in reality inside us and we are wandering outside in the world. The Nectar of the Lord is in the corner of our heart, while we are remaining thirsty.

“The Beloved is in the home, while I search in the world outside. The water is in the pot, and I am wandering in thirst.”

When you pray, enter the closet of the body and shut the outer doors. Do not let the attention wander outside. Open your heart to the Lord within. He will listen to the prayer made in this secret spot. Christ said:

“But when thou shalt pray, enter into thy chamber, and having shut the door, pray to thy Father in secret, and thy Father who seeth in secret will repay thee.” (St. Mathew 6:6)

This body is the temple in which the soul resides. By closing its doors, evil thoughts are kept away and thoughts of the Lord gain strength. The Lord is within us. We cannot see Him with our outer senses. It is only the Inner Eye that can see Him. The gross eyes cannot see Him. When the gross eyes are closed, then the inner eye which can see Him, opens. Guru Nanak says those eyes which can see the Lord are different from the outer eyes.

“Oh Nanak! Those eyes are different by which He can be seen.” (Maru War M5, 1110-1)

The Gurus say that on gathering together the attention from the ten senses, the Lord appears within.

“It is spread in the ten senses, in his soul there is Light.” (Gauri M5, 236-14)

In order to reach the depth of true prayer, the senses, which lead to the spreading of attention, should be restrained. Close the lips and forget about the body, and unite with the Lord or the Master at the seat of the soul within.

In order to pray correctly, it is necessary that we should go inside and shut the outer doors, withdraw our attention from the body, and direct it to the feet of the Beloved. In this sacred place pray to the Master, the incarnation of the Lord. He will appear and will lend a helping hand. Such a prayer will be accepted. To lose oneself in the remembrance of the Lord, with inner purity and sincere feelings, is true prayer. This should not be merely for show or

ostentation. It should be with sincere feelings and not mere verbal effusion. If a prayer is made with true inner feelings, then the all-powerful Lord listens and invaluable benefits accrue from His Mercy.

Conditions for Prayers

The first condition for praying is that there should be a Being to whom prayers are offered. One should have full faith in the Lord or in His form, the Master, in whom He is manifested. When there is no faith or belief in His power, there can be no true prayer. We have read about the Lord in books or heard about Him from the Saints. He is manifested in the Saints. He who has seen a Saint has seen the Lord.

“He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.” (St. John 14:9)

We have our Master to pray to, and a disciple should ask Him for His aid at every step. There should be full faith in His powers, and full love, confidence and humility. The prayer should be pure in thoughts and offered in humility, free from selfishness, filled with love and full of confidence. There should be no doubt or disbelief. Such a prayer made in humility does not go in vain. With a humble mind, surrender all to His Merciful Grace.

“I am nothing, nothing is mine, protect me from disgrace; I am Thy servant.” (Belawal Sadana, 858)

Such a prayer inspires the soul and lifts it up towards the Lord.

The Necessity of Absorption

While praying, keep yourself in the presence of the Lord and give up all thoughts about the body. If you think on the one hand of the Lord and on the other of the body, your thoughts will be divided. You are then a worshipper both of Kal (the negative power) and Dayal (God). You should go into His presence with the coverings of the mind and body removed. You alone, in your humility, should be there. Then only you and your Lord will be there. To remain always with the Lord is to carry out His orders. A wonderful love for the Lord will then awaken in you.

The relationship between us and the Lord is that of a particle and the whole. When we are fully united with Him, then no thought of the body will remain and egotism will disappear. The conscious Current of the Lord will in this way give us a new life, and all calamities and afflictions will be removed. Under these conditions, when we give up bodily actions in remembrance of God, a new life-giving Current of the Lord enters us, and our material and spiritual deficiencies are removed.

The Necessity of Truth and Contentment

For praying truly and well, it is necessary that our lives should be based on truth. Our conduct should be pure. There should be truth in our heart and mind. We should speak the truth. Truth is related to conduct. Truth and conduct go together. Wherever truth is mentioned there is talk of conduct, for truth comes first and then right conduct.

The common saying is: *“Practice truth and right conduct, and become truthful and holy.”* It is necessary to preserve the purity of one's life and its influence. If one practices truth, then whatever he says will be true. Nature will help him. It is necessary to have contentment also. As long as there is no contentment, the mind does not give up spreading out, and without one-pointedness there can be no true prayer. Guru Nanak says that if prayer is made with truth and contentment, the Lord will hear it and will call the devotee to sit near Him, and that such a prayer is undoubtedly granted.

“The prayer made with truth and contentment is heard, and the devotee is seated near the Lord.”
(Ramkali M1, 878)

Praying with the Heart

One's prayers should come from the heart. Our heart, head and tongue should agree. Pray in such a manner that your inner feelings are aroused, every pore begins to weep, and all the veins become like the strings of a violin. The feeling of love should pour forth and you should become absorbed in your prayer. Your discrimination should awaken. Consider the Lord to be present and a witness. Present your inner feelings to Him. There should be nothing whatever between you and the Lord. Ask for His help in all humility. There should be no egotism or showiness. There is no need to stand on high platforms and to cry loudly.

“Oh Kabir, the priest cries from the minaret, but the Lord is not deaf. He, whom you are calling, is inside you.” (Shalok Kabir Ji, 1374-8)

No Particular Language or Words are Necessary for Prayers

No particular language is necessary for praying. If, while one is praying, he considers himself bound by some formula, the inner flow of love is not continuous. One is thus deprived of full spiritual benefit. Long and learned phrases are not necessary. A prayer should be replete with inner feelings. Although long words and phrases may satisfy our intellect, they lead to one becoming subject to the disease of ostentation. By becoming involved in the structure and recitation of the words, we become far removed from the true feeling of the heart. Our prayers then do not correctly represent the state of our heart and conduct. Our condition becomes that of a grave made of lime and mortar which contains the corpse of an infidel.

It may be observed that we often indulge in hypocritical prayer in which our heart and head are not in agreement. In Tibet, people go about in the streets with a prayer wheel, a machine that repeats prayers for them. When it is turned, the names written on it are turned, and it is considered that the names have been repeated so many times. People even earn money for turning a prayer wheel once or twice. How can such prayer benefit anyone?

Even when our prayers appear to be beautiful and full of feeling, but our inner life is impure, then all our prayers would be false in the sight of the Lord. But if our prayers express our inner feelings and our heart is dyed in humility and love, then our prayers are heard and granted by the Lord. It is not wise to deceive ourselves and others, for the reality cannot be kept hidden and will someday become known. To repent, after realizing a mistake, is the first step towards reformation, and the next step is to reform oneself. The temptation to indulge in sense pleasures incites us to commit sins, and we have to pay for them. We reap as we sow.

Maulana Rumi has given a beautiful example of prayer. Moses, one day, met a shepherd who was praying in loving words, *“Oh Lord, where are You? I will be Your servant. I will mend Your clothes, and will comb the hair of Your head. Oh Lord, let my life be sacrificed to You. I will sacrifice my wife and children and my home for You. I will supply You with milk. If You are willing, I will serve You. I will kiss Your hands and feet. I will stay on guard at Your gate while You sleep. I will bring milk, ghee, cheese, fried cakes, pots of curd and other good things for You to eat and drink. I will sacrifice all my goats for You, and will ever remain weeping in longing for You.”*

On hearing this, Moses said, *“Fie on you. You are mad. You are no longer a believer, but an infidel. What is all this useless and impure talk? Keep silent. Your impurity has polluted the world and soiled the silken cloth of religion. If you will not stop, the fire of wrath will come and destroy the earth. The Lord, like the sun, does not need these things, for He has no body. Nor does He depend on hands and feet. If your talk is meant for those who have become one with the Lord, then also it is ludicrous. If a believer is called by the name of Fatima he would feel offended, because it is the name of a woman. He would feel annoyed and would beat you. The Lord is free from birth and death, and to pray to Him as though He had hands and feet is to insult Him.”*

On hearing this the shepherd said, *“Oh Moses, you have sealed my lips. I am bewildered and on fire.”* He tore his clothes and began to weep, and then ran away to the jungle. Moses then heard the voice of the Lord saying, *“Alas! Why have you separated my seekers from me? I sent you to the world to bring about union, and not separation.”*

“You have come for uniting and not for separating.” (Maulana Rumi)

The Lord then continued to speak to Moses, saying: *“Everyone remembers Me in accordance with his own language and temperament. Whatever the shepherd offered, I accepted. I am not pleased with you, for I regard the refusal of such offers as reprehensible. My duty is to shower Grace. By telling beads it is not I who become pure, but they who do so. Oh Moses, I do not look at the outside, but at the inner state. I accept whatever men say when they pray, even if it is poorly expressed, when it comes from the heart. The feelings of the heart are the real thing; the words merely express them. I want real longing from the heart. Generate yearning within yourself. Kindle the fire of love which burns away all thoughts and languages. Oh Moses, those who observe rules and regulations are different from evolved and devoted souls. For the lovers, every breath produces yearning.”*

Nobody levies a tax on ruined villages. It is not necessary to wash the blood of the martyrs. Their blood is purer than purest water. Their faults are better than hundreds of good actions done by others. Do not expect guidance from observers of form. The religion of love is different from other forms of worship. For lovers, the Lord is the only religion and creed. If a ruby does not bear the seal, it does not matter.

When Moses heard these angry words of the Lord, he ran to the shepherd and told him, *“I have brought good news for you. The Lord has accepted your prayers. Your unbelief stands on the same footing as belief. Your belief is the light of life. You may say whatever you like without any fear.”* The shepherd replied, *“I am now above these matters. When you scolded me, I took a different turn. But then I crossed the skies in one bound and became a confidant and close friend of the Lord. My condition is now beyond description.”*

Time for Prayers

Most people think that a certain time is necessary for prayers, and that this must be found when they are not busy with their duties. But to pray properly it is not necessary to spend a long time on reasoned speeches. One should express his inner feelings in simple language while praying. All times are suitable for prayer. Morning, evening and bedtime are particularly beneficial.

The difficulties relating to the time and place for prayer are fewer than the difficulties of praying inwardly. We do not know what we should pray for and how to pray. It is therefore necessary to pray, "*Lord, teach us to pray*". We should take advantage of the examples of the prayers composed by Saints and Holy Men.

When to Pray

It is usually the case that a man calls for the help of the Lord when he is helpless or in poverty. But when he attains affluence, he no longer feels the need of prayer and thinks that his own strength and social forces will suffice for the future. He thus makes a big mistake.

Man should pray under any and all conditions. When in difficulty he should pray for the solution of his problems, and when there is no solution, for strength to bear them or to keep up his courage. When, as a result of his efforts, he sees prospects of success, he should pray for the Mercy and Grace of the Lord, in order to avoid relying on his own efforts and his egotism. Unless His Grace and Mercy join with our own efforts, no real success can be achieved. When the heart's desire has been obtained then sacrifice all in thankfulness and gratitude to Him.

The Working of Prayer

To confess our sins in prayer and to think that they are thereby washed away or removed is a mistake. This kind of mistake keeps us away from true spirituality. Our sins will only be forgiven when the Lord or the Master forgives them. Actually, such prayers may become the cause of evil. A man may offer such prayers and then keep on committing sins without hesitation. And all the while he goes on praying under the false impression that his sins will be forgiven as a result of his prayers.

The Master comes to persuade men to give up sin and to unite them with the Lord. Our duty is to act in accordance with His wishes and to give up all evil deeds which are worldly. We may thus save ourselves from sins and by the practice of Naam and remembrance, unite ourselves with the Lord. Love for the Lord and the Master reforms us, and makes us follow the path of the Lord. Man may forgive, but it is the all-pervading power of the Master which ultimately reforms a sinner.

How can we become true, how will the chain of untruth be broken? Oh Nanak, it is written that the Master's Will should be obeyed.

To cry to the Lord for forgiveness and to think that we can then commit more sins is a mistake. Diseases are punishments for sins. When there has been a sin, it can only be atoned for by undergoing suitable punishment. The root cause of all sins is identifying oneself with the body. Unless we rise above bodily considerations, thoughts of sensual pleasures and desires to enjoy them do not disappear.

“Many a seeker gets into trouble because his search for pleasures leads to disease. The desire for pleasures does not go without submitting to His Will. Till then one wanders.” (Maru M1, 1034-16)

To think that His Mercy is dependent on requests made through prayer is a mistake. He does not forgive or punish as a result of whether or not we ask for forgiveness. This is to make prayer an instrument to permit the committing of sins. The Master acts with great circumspection and consideration. On the one hand He forgives sins; and on the other He restrains the disciple from committing them in the future so that he may become clean and pure.

Prayer cannot change the principle of truth, nor can it enable one to understand it. It is through the attraction of inner love and yearning and by obeying the directions of the Master that we are led to the truth. Our prayers to understand the truth need not be said loudly. Such prayers can be made mentally or by living properly and in His Will.

The purpose of prayer is to lead us to act according to the wishes of the Lord. We are weak and feeble. We wish to reach the Lord with the aid of the Mercy and Strength of the Master. Even though we may fall at every step, that power helps us. It is a law of spirituality that if a disciple takes one step on the path indicated by the Master, the Master takes a hundred steps to meet him. He is the bestower of all benefits. He is beyond praise or comprehension. He is immortal and limitless.

“If you take one step to take refuge in the Master, the Master meets you on the way by taking hundreds of steps. If you remember the Master just once, the Master remembers you again and again. Even if your devotion is as small as a fragment of a cowrie shell, the Master showers all benefits on you. The Master is all Merciful, His praise is beyond understanding; I bow again and again to the one and incomprehensible Master.” (Bhai Gurdas Ji)

Effects of Prayer on Others

Prayer is a great power. In prayer the current of our contemplation unites with the Lord, and the seeker receives many wonderful benefits as a result. Can others be benefited through our prayers? Since the soul is a particle of the Lord, all souls are interrelated. The Lord pervades all. To wish well to everybody is, therefore, in accordance with His Will. The currents of goodwill that emanate from great souls are for all living beings and benefit them. There is particular mention of this in the Sikh Scriptures. They say that by remembering great souls, the inner feelings are aroused and a connection is made with them. Such a prayer results in spiritual progress, and in the end, one prays for the good of all.

“May all prosper according to Thy Will.”

After Muslims complete their prayers, they pray for the believers and unbelievers, that is, for Muslims, Hindus and others. Buddhists pray for the welfare of all. Christ said that one should pray for his enemies. Hindus pray for the welfare of all living beings, both sentient and insentient. The practitioners of Christian Science cure those who are ill by means of prayers. To wish well to others is in accordance with His Will. Those who are experts in the science of telepathy know that one is affected by the thoughts of others, whether they be near or far. It has also been observed that the prayers of one person sometimes result in another person having some experience, which may be in the form of an inner vision.

Sincere prayer from the heart of the disciple reaches the Master, and remembrance of the disciple by the Master produces peace and bliss in the disciple. This is really a form of telepathy. In this way, we can connect our thoughts with the Master and can also use them for the good of others. To benefit another it is necessary that we first connect our thoughts with the Lord and then contemplate on the form of the other person and pray that he will be connected with the Master also. During such prayer, we have to feel the presence of the Lord and surrender our attention to His merciful and loving will. In this way, we lay the foundation for good to come to others.

Why All Our Prayers Are Not Granted

It is a common experience that all things which one asks for in prayer are not received. The reason for this is that we do not know the Mercy of the Lord, and ask for things that are not for our real good. That Power wants our evolution and progress. When that Power finds that what is asked for would involve the devotee further in the world, He does not grant it. If the Lord does not grant us the things we ask for, in order to save us from sinning, this is for our good. In the Christian scriptures, it is said:

“Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.”

We are entangled in bodily and sensual pleasures. Our vision does not rise above them. If we were to receive all we ask for, we would certainly be involved in more sensual pleasures and our sins would increase.

The question: *“When the Lord or Master hears all our prayers and has the power to grant them, why does He not do so?”* In this connection it should be understood that man is merely one part in the machine of the universe, and is related to all other parts. Our desires, therefore, affect the whole world. Our vision being limited, we cannot see beyond ourselves and our surroundings. But the Lord or the Master can see the whole of the universe. He knows everything from the beginning to the end. He knows the devotee's genuine needs also. For example, the residents of a city which is being oppressed by unbearable heat may pray for rain, while the farmers are praying for more sunshine to ripen their crops. The human intellect is limited and an individual does not know whether what he is asking for would in the long run be for his good. He simply looks to the immediate circumstances and is unaware of the future. Relying on his limited intelligence, he often prays for something that would harm him. In his haste, he demands many things and then realizes his mistake and is thankful that his prayer was not granted, for otherwise he would have suffered a great loss.

It is said in the holy Quran, *“Just as a man prays for his good, he often asks for things that are harmful.”* The fact is that man is very hasty and short-sighted.

The Lord or the Master knows our past, present and future. He knows when a thing asked for is not for our good, and therefore does not grant it. It often happens that a seeker asks for something which is not to his real advantage. He presses for it, and a promise may be made, but the thing is not given to him. A child may ask his mother for poison. Owing to his insistence the mother may make a promise, but she will never give the poison to the child, even though she may outwardly consent to do so. It is not for the good of the child, but he does not know owing to his ignorance. The Saints, therefore tell us that we should always pray to the Lord:

“Oh Lord! I know nothing. I have been sold into the hands of the mind and Maya.”

(Ravidas, Jaitsari, 7101)

Nizami says: *“Oh my Well-Wisher, lead me to that which is for my good. Show me the path that leads to Your pleasure and to my salvation.”*

“Keep me on that path, Oh my Well-Wisher, that You wish me to lead. That path should lead to Your pleasure and to my salvation.” (Nizami)

The Lord and the Master are omniscient and know fully well what is for our good and what would do us harm. It is said in the holy Quran, *“Oh Lord, give us in this world that which will help us hereafter also, and save us from the sufferings of hell.”*

Is it Necessary to Pray to the Lord?

The Lord is not pleased with the words of one's praise. They make no change in the Current of Mercy and Grace which is being showered on us, for He is the embodiment of knowledge, love and mercy. Of course, by praying in humility and faith, we can take more advantage of that Current of Mercy. But he does not stand in need of vocal prayers, for He knows our hidden feelings.

Prayers cannot make any change in the Current of Mercy. It is what it is. But prayers can bring us into harmony with this Current. It is not necessary to beg for our needs. This often becomes an obstruction.

The Lord is love. Is it proper for us to ask Him to be more loving? He knows all. Can we tell Him anything that He does not know already? Can we change His perfection? Is it necessary to pray to Him for more Mercy when He is already giving us more than we deserve? By not voicing our feelings, we come nearer to His Presence and Grace. He is eternal. He is the same in the beginning, the present and the end.

“True from the beginning, true through the ages; He is true and shall be true.” (Jap Ji, Stanza 1)

The Lord is the embodiment of truth. Truth emanates from Him continually without His being reminded of it. How can man with his limited intellect advise Him? The Current of His Mercy is flowing everywhere. It is taking care of us of itself. It knows what is for our good. It is present everywhere. It perceives our feelings and hears us. Where then is the necessity to pray before Him?

“Wherever I look, I see You dwelling there; to whom should I Pray? The Lord hears all.”
(Gauri M5, 205)

It is our duty to be in harmony with Him and thus to derive the utmost benefit. It is very necessary that we should meditate on Him in our heart, so that His reflection may shine within us. The soul is a particle and an image of Him and shares His wonderful qualities. To learn to understand the Lord is a continuous process and to succeed in it, we should surrender all our thoughts, powers and desires at His feet. It is strange that while we say that the Lord is present everywhere and is eternal, we try to tell Him about ourselves. Are we thankful to the Lord for all the gifts and mercies shown to us? If we are sincerely thankful, we become deserving of more Grace even without asking for it.

Guru Arjan Sahib in the fifth canto of the Sukhmani Sahib speaks of the many gifts and blessings we are enjoying and tells us how to express our gratitude for them. He says that it is through His kindness that we enjoy many kinds of food, have many kinds of sweets, live in palaces, reside in comfortable houses, wear good clothes and fine ornaments, sleep on comfortable beds, receive public honors, have healthy bodies, all our faults remain hidden, and we ride elephants and in carriages, possess gardens, houses, estates and wealth.

The Lord has satisfied our desires. We are respected in this world and hereafter. We are beautiful and hear the Shabd with our inner ear. We have influence. All our works are successful, and we are honored at the time of death. For all these and other blessings we should express our gratitude; we should remember that they come from Him and should meditate on Him. We should contemplate on Him and pray to Him. We should always remember Him. We should always praise Him and fix our attention on Him. We should not be remiss in His remembrance and should never forget Him. He should ever dwell in our hearts.

Where else could we find refuge if we should give up such a bountiful Lord? We should keep in mind the Lord through Whose Grace we eat so many delicious kinds of food. By remembering Him, through Whose Grace we perfume the body with sweet-smelling scents, we will get salvation.

Contemplate with your mind on Him through Whose Grace you reside in comfortable houses.

Remember all the twenty-four hours, Him through Whose Grace you live at ease in your home.

Oh Nanak! Remember always Him Who is worthy of your contemplation through Whose Grace you enjoy so many pleasures.

Whom else could you love if you should give up Him through Whose Grace you have fine clothes and beautiful ornaments?

Praise always Him through Whose Grace you sleep on comfortable beds.

Contemplate with your mind on Him through Whose Grace you are kept on the path of duty.

By remembering the Lord you will be honored and will accompany your Lord to His home, oh Nanak.

Love the Lord through Whose Grace you have this healthy body.

Praise the Lord through Whose Grace your secrets remain hidden and your mind is at rest.

Kneel before the Lord and Master through Whose Grace all your defects are kept concealed.

Even if you do not receive His Grace, remember the Lord on high with every breath.

Oh Nanak, be a devotee of Him through Whose Grace you were given this rare human body.

Oh mind, do not be remiss in remembering the Lord through Whose Grace you wear fine ornaments.

Oh mind, do not forget the Lord through Whose Grace you ride on horses and elephants.

Keep in your mind the Lord through Whose Grace you possess lands and gardens.

Remember always, while standing or sitting, the Lord Who has molded your mind.

Meditate on the One Unseen, oh Nanak, Who will look after you both here and hereafter.

Oh mind, always think of Him through Whose Grace you give generously in charity and donations.

Remember with every breath the Lord through Whose Grace you observe right conduct.

Remember always the Lord of wonderful form through Whose Grace you also have a beautiful form.

Remember day and night the Lord Who has given you this noble body.

Praise the Master, oh Nanak, through Whose Grace your honor is maintained, through Whose Grace the ears hear the Music of the Name. The eyes see the world's wonders, the tongue becomes sweet, one lives happily, the hands move and work, the full fruits of action are obtained, the state of bliss is enjoyed, and one merges in all-embracing peace. How can such a Lord be given up and another loved? Love for Him awakens with the Grace of the Master.

Do not forget the Lord through Whose Grace you have come into this world.

Oh foolish mind, remember the Lord through Whose Grace you have become great.

Oh mind, live in the presence of Him through Whose Grace you have found the truth.

Oh Nanak, remember Him along through Whose Grace all obtain salvation. He Himself makes one remember the Name, the Lord Himself makes one sing His praises.

By His kindness you get Light; by His Mercy the lotus opens.

When He is pleased He dwells in the heart. By His Mercy the intellect becomes pure.

Oh Lord, Your Mercy is supreme; one can achieve nothing by one's own efforts alone.

Oh Lord, Your devotee serves wherever You wish;

Oh Nanak, one has no choice in the matter. (Gauri M5 Sukhmani 269)

One should not forget the giver of the blessings when one receives blessings. Those who forget Him do not remember death.

“The gift is a blessing; the giver is forgotten; the fool does not think of death.” (Dhanasri M5, 676)

If, on receiving His bounty, we do not show sincere gratitude but merely express verbal thanks, we deceive both ourselves and the Lord. We cannot hide the emptiness of our gratitude from the Lord and the world. One makes himself liable to be punished by such behavior.

Fruits of Prayer

The purpose of prayer is to connect one's inner self with the Lord, and to become absorbed in Him. Prayer is the essence of spirituality; through it we begin to realize Him.

Prayer is the best relaxation and recreation. The soul, mind and body gain blissful rest and happiness, which cannot be obtained by any other means. Even with the minimum of sleep, no harm is caused to the mind or body.

We find that in prayer one's inner stability increases, fearlessness is augmented, and inner purity is obtained. Diseases can also be cured in oneself and in others. At times of need and danger unexpected help is received. These experiences show that it is necessary to pray to the Divine Power. When no human efforts can avail, an appeal to the Lord and the Master brings the needed help.

“Where all human efforts fail, there prayer succeeds.”

A deep impression is created on the human mind by prayer. Even if one's fate is not changed by prayer, we are certainly changed. Our whole attitude towards meeting a calamity or affliction changes. The power of the mind to strive for salvation is strengthened. When the angle of vision changes, the whole world changes. The earth and the sky take on a different color. A man feels very much perturbed when a calamity comes, but when the angle of vision is changed, he bears the calamity cheerfully.

The highest form of prayer does not consist in the actual act of praying, but in awakening in the Lord. When this state is reached, diseases disappear, sins are destroyed, and death becomes non-existent. True prayer consists in increasing love in the inner self for the Master, and merging in Him. When we are in communion with Him, then by coming in contact with the Lord the inner powers of our soul are awakened. Prayers for selfish gain and for spiritual progress are very different. As compared to spiritual prayer, the other prayer is of no consequence. Reference has already been made to this point.

Stages in the Development of Prayer

After some time the devotee begins to feel more happiness and peace in his inner spiritual progress than in his bodily comforts. The following prayer occurs in the Varhad Arnayak Upanishad: *“Lead us from untruth to truth, from darkness to light, and from death to immortality.”*

As the gaze of the devotee is turned away from outer things, he begins to feel that all worldly pleasures are unreal. He experiences the Everlasting and Eternal Being, and worldly pleasures appear to be transitory and perishable. He, therefore, thinks it of no value to ask for worldly comforts.

“What should I ask for? All is transitory.” (Kabir, Dhanasri 692)

All the world is busy eating, drinking and making merry, but a devotee has no liking for or interest in these activities. He attends only to the essential needs of the body, and spends the rest of the time in communion with the Lord. He prays, *“O Lord! Take me out of the ocean of this world. You are my only refuge.”*

“Many lives have been spent in eating, drinking and making merry. Take me out of the ocean of the world. Oh Lord, Nanak relies on you.” (Gauri M, 261)

In accordance with the teachings of the Gurus, the devotee looks after the body only so that the Lord may dwell in his heart and his tongue may repeat His Name.

“May the holy feet of the Lord dwell in my heart, and may my tongue repeat the Name of the Lord; Oh Nanak, remember the Lord who preserves the body.” (Bihagara War M5, 554)

He is conscious of his ignorance on this path, and knowing his weaknesses he extends his hands in prayer for help.

“Oh Lord, take me across; I am ignorant, and do not know the way. Help me, oh Lord!”
(Nam Dev, Guru, 873)

As the disciple's inner sight changes, so does his prayer. In the beginning, he is conscious of the body and of bodily needs. He thinks it necessary to pray for them. But as his Inner Eyes are opened, he begins to feel the spiritual needs, and his prayers change. He knows that he has to control the senses and still the mind in order to reach the spiritual regions and the original home of the soul.

This is not an easy task. The impressions of many births are in the mind and his inclinations are based on them. He cannot give up his old ways. He sometimes turns to spiritual seeking, while at other times he is drawn the other way by the needs of the self and the body. He sometimes succeeds, while at other times he succumbs. His heart is not in the world or its wealth, but the mind cannot yet remain fixed in the Lord all the time. He feels that he is full of sins, while at the same time people are calling him good.

“Oh Farid! My clothes are black and my dress is black. I am full of sins, but people call me a Dervesh.” (Farid, Salok, 1381)

The devotee gets tired of this unavoidable conflict and wishes to give it up. He gives it up for some time, but the love of the Lord does not let him wander. The waves of hope spring up in him, and he again turns to Him.

“He who falls while walking is not to be blamed; Oh Kabir! He who does not move has all the way to go.” (Kabir Sahib)

Unless all the ten senses are controlled and the mind is turned inward, there is no Light in the soul.

“He who controls the ten senses, in his soul there is Light.” (Gauri M, 236)

The diseases of the mind are very dangerous, but they appear very sweet to the devotee. One cannot give them up even though he may be tired of them. A lustful person cannot easily give up lust, even though he knows its bad results. For overcoming these diseases, he needs the help and strength of some powerful personage such as the Master.

“Control the mind by the strength of the Master.” (Sar Bachan)

To gain victory over the mind, the help of the Master is very necessary. By the strength of the Master, the mind that is entangled in attachment and Maya awakens.

“Awaken your sleeping mind by remembering the Master.” (Suhī M4, 758)

Maulana Rumi also says that the mind cannot be controlled without the help of the Master.

Ask For the Lord of the Lord

For the needed help cry to the Lord or His incarnation, the Master, *“Oh Lord! We are cunning, hard-hearted, crafty and lustful. But take us across in spite of all this. You are all-powerful, You can give us refuge. Save us through Your Grace.”*

Jap (repetition of names), Tap (austerities), rules of discipline, cleanliness and self-discipline cannot rid us of our faults. *“Oh Lord! We are in utter darkness. Pray take us out of it. Favor us with a kind and merciful glance.”*

Guru Nanak says:

“Cunning, hard-hearted, crafty and lustful am I; Oh Lord! Take me across despite my faults. You are powerful and the giver of refuge. Preserve me by Your Will. Jap, Tap, Name, cleanliness, self-discipline will not rid me of my weaknesses.”

“Oh Lord! Through Your Grace take Nanak out of this utter darkness.” (Kanra M5, 1301-18)

He again prays: *“Oh Lord! Save us. We can do nothing by ourselves. The only way to control the mind is to listen to the Melody of the Name. Please give this to us. Oh Lord! Save us.”*

“We can do nothing by ourselves. By Your Grace give us the Name.” (Dhanasri M5, 675)

“To those who pray to the Lord through the Master and Holy Men and take refuge in Him, the Light of the Name is revealed.” (Gojri M4, 492)

Yogis of the past, learned men, ascetics, yatis (self-disciplined men) and men of letters all became tired of their efforts to find the true way and failed. Nothing they did was of any avail against the mind. None of their efforts succeeded in controlling the mind. The only effective way is the practice of the true Shabd or Name, and this can be had only from a Master.

“Control the mind by listening to the Melody. It will not be controlled by any other method. The mind can only be controlled by hearing the Melody; the yogi practices yoga, while the learned increase their knowledge; the ascetics are tired of austerities, and the practice of self-discipline also failed them; the devotees engage in mental contemplation and are deceived; the pandits read the Vedas and enlarge their knowledge, but fail; keenness of intellect does not help, and inaction leads to regret. No other practice can help. Practice listening to the Shabd. When the Shabd is realized the Master is found, and the disciple attends on Him with detachment, when the practice of Surat Shabd is perfected, then only is the mind controlled.”
(Sar Bachan, 216)

After receiving the wealth of Naam, the wandering of the mind comes to an end. It then does not wish to remain away from the Lord, but wishes to live with Him forever.

“Oh mother! I have been given the Lord's Name; my mind has stopped its wavering and is now still.” (Basant M9,1186)

In this state the devotee feels that the Lord is always with him. He hands over all his sufferings and worries to Him and is unmoved by either pain or pleasure. He is convinced that the Lord is thousands of times more intelligent, wise, strong and merciful than himself and that He looks after His devotee and is his greatest well-wisher. He hands over his worries and his intellect to Him, and remains content with His Will. His intellect becomes keen, and his prayers become perfect. He surrenders everything to the Lord and says, *“O Lord! You are the refuge of all living beings. You came here for the sake of all. Whatever You will is good for me. This is my only prayer.”*

“Whatever meets with Your approval is right conduct. You are the ever-existing formless One.”
(Jap Ji, Stanza 4-2)

“All living beings depend on You, and You take care of them; whatever You will is good for me. This is the prayer of Nanak.” (Belawal M1, 765-13)

“Oh Nanak! Praised be the Name. May You bless all.”

In the end, after attaining joy in surrendering to the Lord's Will, the seeker gives up praying. He knows that the Lord knows all. He remains happy in the state ordained by the Lord; he loves all actions of the Lord.

“Wherever I look, You are there. This is my firm conviction. To whom should I pray, when the Lord hears everything?” (Gauri M5, 205-9)

“Wherever He dwells, there is heaven.” (Majh M5, 106-7)

“Your acts are like Nectar to me. Nanak prays for the gift of the Name only.” (Asa M5, 394-4)

When the omniscient One knows all, to whom can we pray? When He is present in every heart, to whom should we make our supplication?

“The Lord knows all and is omniscient. To whom then should we pray?” (Sorath M5, 625-1)

“What can the lowly say in prayer, when the Lord is present in all hearts?” (Kama M4, 1304-10)

The Saints have attained this state and it seems to them to be infidelity to pray and to doubt His Grace. Saints always remain reconciled to His Will. They are absorbed in Him. The devotee and the Lord become one. The Lord is in control of the devotee, and whatever desire springs up in the heart of the devotee is at once granted by Him. Wherever the devotee may go, the Lord goes, and He helps him at every step, just as a mother helps her little child. Guru Arjan Sahib says:

“Whatever is asked is given by the Lord; oh Nanak! Whatever is said by Him proves to be true.”
(Dhanasri M5, 681-19)

“Whatever the work of the devotee may be, the Lord hastens to do it, He always shows Himself to be with the devotee. Whatever he asks from the Lord, the same comes to pass at once.”
(Asa M5, 403-15)

Kabir Sahib says that his mind became as pure as the water of the Ganges. The Lord followed him, saying, *“Kabir, Kabir.”* He further says that the Lord was always waiting for him to ask for something so that He might give it to him.

“Oh Kabir! The mind has become pure like the water of the Ganges. The Lord follows me, saying, ‘Kabir, Kabir.’ ” (Kabir, Salok, 1367-8)

The hunger of the devotee is satisfied when he meets the Lord, and he then no longer feels hungry or thirsty. He receives from the Lord the treasure of Naam, and this gives him all the nine powers. He gets whatever his heart desires. His prayers never remain unanswered.

“When You are his Father, oh Lord, how can he be hungry? He receives the Name and the nine miraculous powers from You, and he gets whatever he desires.” (Malar M5, 1266)

“His supplications never go in vain.” (Bilawal M5, 819-11)

He now knows the reality of prayer. To pray means that one is still not perfect. But when the Lord makes a man perfect, he lacks nothing.

“My heart responds to Your Will, since it is perfect.” (Ravidas, Dhanasri, 694-6)

What can a devotee ask for when the Lord is always with him? The devotee is absorbed in the form of the Lord. Both become one. Who is to ask and from whom? What a wonderful description of this state has been given by Guru Arjan Dev Sahib:

“He is deathless, so I am fearless; He does not desert me, and I am not a prisoner; He is not a pauper, and I am not hungry; He has no cares, and I have no trouble; Him no one can destroy; He is the one who gives life; He is free from bondage, and we are not bound; He does not have to toil, and we are not slaves; He is not attached, and we are not attached; He is bliss, and we are happy in His Will; He is not worried, and we have no cares; He is not stained, and we too are not stained; He is not hungry, and we have no hunger; He is pure, and we are pure because of Him; we are nothing; He is the only one; He is both in front and behind; oh Nanak! The Guru removes all delusion and doubts; I have become one by uniting with Him.” (Asa M5, 391-1)

What Should be Asked of the Lord and the Master

The Master is the mouthpiece of God. It is the Master in whom the Lord is manifest. Just as we can go to a sea-beach and bathe, enjoy the splashing of the waves, and offer flowers and sweets to the sea, similarly, the Master is the beach of the limitless ocean of the consciousness of the Lord. The Master is full of spiritual consciousness, and the Light of the consciousness of the Lord is in Him. He is omniscient and knows all our needs and requirements. If a spiritually hungry devotee sits beside the Master in all humility, is this in any way less than prayer? He knows the heart and mind of everyone.

Ask for the Name from the Master and Saints and Beg of Them for Their Grace

We should pray to the Master to unite us with the Lord, as those in whose heart the Lord dwells sleep peacefully. We should pray, *“My Master, I thirst for the sight of the Beloved. I ever remember His feet and hope to see Him in my heart.”* In the Saints the Lord Himself is present, having assumed their form.

He assumes the form of the Saint. (Maru M5, 1005-8)

Oh Saints! I have come to You as I have heard that the Lord is kind to His devotees. I have taken shelter with You. Oh Lord Hari! Save the honor of Your slave. I have been separated from You for many ages. Oh Lord! Unite me with You. A great fire is consuming my mind and body. Oh Master! I rely on You. Hear my prayer. This is my only supplication before Your Saints, that they may, in their kindness, make me one with You.

“Oh Mother, unite me with the Beloved; all my friends in whose houses dwells the Lord sleep peacefully.” (Malar M5, 1267-15)

I remember Your holy feet, and pine to see You; I pray to the Saints; my heart thirsts to see You. (Malar M5, 1268)

“When I prayed to the Saints; the Lord, who is kind to His devotees, appeared; oh Nanak, He hastened to them to save their honor and make them His own.” (Todi M4, 712)

“I have great hope of seeing the Lord; oh Master, hear the prayer of Nanak.” (Maru M4, 896-17)

“Oh Saints, Nanak prays to You to make him your own.” (Suhi M5, 759-18)

“I will ask of the friends who have found Him; I will fall at their feet and learn the path.” (TelangM1, 725-4)

Oh Master! We are insects of Maya; have mercy on us and give us the Light of the Name. Oh Master, beloved of the Lord, the Transcendent Being, I pray to You.

“We are like insects; we take shelter in You; have mercy and give us the Light of the Name.” (Gujri M4, 10-2)

Bhai Gurdas has given a beautiful example of prayer by a disciple. He says, *“Oh Master! I am a sinner. I am separated from You and am a very low and worthless fellow. I have all the faults. I am in the habit of stealing and committing adultery. I am a gambler. I have an eye on the houses of others. I am a backbiter, an evil-doer and indolent, and am deceiving everyone by my hypocrisy. I am intoxicated with lust and anger and am full of greed, attachment and egotism. I am unfaithful and ungrateful. Who can save me? Oh Master! I pray to You as a pauper. You always forgive; forgive me also.”*

“I am accursed, a sinner, low and worthless; a thief, an adulterer, a gambler and one having an eye on the houses of others; a back-biter, evil-doer, indolent, a hypocrite and deceitful to all; one who indulges in lust, anger, drink, greed, attachment and egotism. One who is faithless and ungrateful, and trusted by none. I always pray to the Merciful Master.” (War 36, Pauri, 21)

The Master is our caste and honor. We have sold ourselves to Him. Oh Master! Whether good or bad we are now Master and disciples. Have mercy and save our honor. We bow at your feet without any pride. You are the pride of us humble ones. You are all-powerful.

“Guru is our caste and honor. We have sold ourselves to Him. Oh Nanak! We are called Master and disciples. Save our honor.” (Suhī M4, 731-10)

We pray to the Perfect Master that He may unite us with the Lord who exists in the beginning, the middle and the end.

“He who is in the beginning, the middle and the end; for Him my mind yearns.” (Gauri M5, 240-10)

When one meets the Lord, true bliss is obtained, and for him the messengers of death cease to exist.

“I prayed to the Master and He united me with the Lord; by this union I obtained bliss and the messengers of death died of starvation.” (Sri Rag M1, 55-13)

Oh Master! We live by seeing You. Oh Lord, hear my prayer, make me Your slave by giving me the gift of the Name, and take me under Your protection. Oh my Master and true friend! This is my prayer, that You who are all virtue, may never forget me.

Oh Master, I live by seeing You. My destiny is fulfilled. Oh Lord! Hear this prayer of mine. Oh provident Lord! Give me Your protection, and make me Your own. Never deprive me, oh Master! of Your protection. Oh My Lord and friend, hear my prayer, let Your feet dwell in my heart. Nanak makes a prayer. Oh All-virtuous One, never forget me.” (Suhī M5, 741-18)

Oh dispeller of all fears, my Master! Nothing is hidden from You. You are merciful. Redeem us fools.

Nothing is beyond You, oh dispeller of all fears; Nanak has taken refuge with the merciful Master; redeem the fool. (Belawal M5, 806-6)

All the world is burning in the intense fire of attachment and Maya (delusion). In order to escape from it, it is necessary to take refuge with the Lord. We, therefore, pray to the Master that He in His mercy may save us from this burning fire and show us His compassion.

“On seeing the world in flames, we run for the shelter of the Lord. We pray to the Perfect Master for safety in the Name of the Lord.” (Vadhans M3, 571-15)

What Should We Ask of the Lord

When a dutiful wife goes to her all-powerful Lord full of hope, she surrenders her all to Him. Her clothes may be torn, but the Lord is pleased with her attitude. Can she then remain poor? No, never.

“Give to Him what is His, and accept the Will of the Lord; he is blessed fourfold; oh Nanak, the Lord is always kind.” (Gauri M5, 268-11)

She asks the Lord for Himself above all. When the Lord comes, what else remains?

“If a man is absorbed in the Lord, what can he lack?” (Gauri M5, 186-8)

A king once went to a foreign country. Before he left, he asked his queens what they would like him to bring for them. One asked for clothes, another for delicious foods, yet another for useful articles, another for articles of beauty, and still others for diamonds and jewels. The youngest queen, who was generally considered a fool but who in reality was the wisest of all, said, *“Oh Emperor! Come back yourself and keep me at your feet, and I will have everything I could wish for.”* The king came back and sent the other queens the presents they had requested and then went to the youngest queen with all he had. How fortunate was that queen! The king had the feeling that he should give all he possessed to her because she truly loved him. The queen sat at his feet, and touched the feet of her all-bountiful lord, and enjoyed his loving gaze. The other queens received a few gifts, but she had the love of her lord. Of what use were the gifts without the lord?

“She did not wish for either food or water, but sighed in separation; how could she feel at rest?” (Gauri M, 244-19)

We, due to our short-sightedness, ask the Lord and the Master for various boons, and these may often increase our sufferings. Instead of asking for boons from the Bountiful Lord, ask for Himself. Then how can there be any lack of anything? To ask for boons is to display a feeling of inferiority and a lack of respect. The queen knows that she is the consort of the king and will have palaces, servants, food, clothing and everything else she may want without asking for them. But if her Lord does not love her, then palaces, silken clothes and every other kind of fine possession would bring her no happiness.

“Burn the expensive articles of adornment; live in the dust, oh Nanak, if He is with you.” (Salok M5, 1424-19)

If the lord is with the queen and these other things are also there, then it is pleasing to possess them. But one who is dyed in the color of her lord is glad to live without them, for the love of her lord is all-sufficing. Our primary needs are physical, and all the world is entangled in meeting these needs. The Lord looks after all. Every living being is provided for at birth. His fate is there before the formation of the body. The milk is there in the breast of the mother before a child is born. Our body takes shape according to our fate. All our suffering is due to short-sightedness.

Fate came into being first, and then the body; oh Tulsi, it is strange that the mind is not at rest.

The body and its requirements are perishable. If you look around you carefully, you will find that nothing is eternal.

“One is born and dies, and merges in non-existence; all this passes before the eyes of the universe.” (Kabir, Gauri, 325-12)

Only the Lord and His Name (God in action) remain forever. All else is perishable. Ask the Lord for Himself and thirst for His sight.

“I pray to the unmanifest to manifest Himself; Your servant Nanak is standing at Your door.”
(Gauri M5, 241-18)

Our original home is the Lord's home-Sach Khand (True Region). We have remained separated from the Lord for a long time. We do not remember for how long we have been wandering, but when we become tired of wandering, we should take refuge with the Lord and pray, *“Oh Lord! have mercy on us and unite us with You.”*

“Our actions have led to our separation; have mercy, oh Lord, and unite us with Yourself, we have come to seek refuge with You, oh Lord, after becoming tired of wandering in all the four corners and ten directions of the world.” (Majh M5, 133-7)

O Lord! We have been separated from You for many ages. You know about all our births. Years have passed without our seeing You. We are now living in the hope of seeing You. I separated from You many births ago, this birth is now dedicated to You; Ravi Dass lives in the hope of seeing You, it is long since he did so. (Ravi Das, Dhanasri, 694-8)

Guru Amar Das Ji prays, *“Oh Lord! We are very much deluded in this world. Have mercy and grant us the boon of seeing You.”*

“We are very much deluded, O Benign Lord, have mercy on us; be merciful and grant us the blessing of Your sight.” (Dhanasri M3, 666-13)

Guru Arjan Sahib directs us to pray, *“Oh Lord! We have been wandering in various bodies in various births and have had many sufferings. We now have a human body owing to Your mercy. Kindly show Yourself to us.”*

“I wandered in various bodies and suffered much; owing to Your kindness I now have a human birth; pray, show Yourself.” (Gauri M, 207-11)

Oh Lord! We are standing at Your door. Unite us with Yourself. O Savior! Save us, for we are tired of wandering. Oh Lord! You are kind to the devotees. You are the redeemer of sinners. There is no one besides You. I cry to You for help in all humility and helplessness. Oh Gracious Lord! This universe is a dangerous ocean. Take me across by holding my hand.

“Unite me with Yourself; I am lying at Your door; oh Savior, save me, for I am tired of wanderings; oh Lord, redeem me, for You always help Your devotees; no one can help me except Yourself; take my hand, and lead me across the ocean of the universe.” (Jaisri M, 709-12)

All wives are happy when they are united with their lords. How miserable am I. I am full of sins, and the Lord does not pay any attention to me. Oh Lord, when will my turn come? Other brides are living happily. Please, I beg, give me some of Your attention and love.

“The other brides are making merry; I am the unfortunate one. I am full of sins, and the Lord pays no attention to me.” (Suhi War M3, 790-12)

“Nanak, the unfortunate one prays for her turn; all other brides are happy; give me Your love as well.” (War Ramkali M3, 959-15)

“All my friends have gone to please their Lord; but where can I, the wretched one go? O my friend, I am beautiful but the Lord does not love me.” (Vadhans M1, 558-2)

Oh Lord! It would be better to show me the gallows than to remain so indifferent to me. It is agony to live without You. Clasp me to Your breast. Accept my prayer. I am dying with longing for You. Turn Your beautiful face towards me. Why do You torment me by turning away?

“Death is preferable to Your indifference; hear me and hold me close. Oh look at me, my Beloved, why torment me by turning away from me.” (Kabir, Asa, 484-8)

I am impatient to see You. My mind is distracted, and I am passing my days in unbearable worry and anxiety. Oh Lord, give me one look of mercy. My life can be happy and fruitful only if I see You. Oh Bewitcher of the mind! Be kind to me. Remove my delusion and appear within me.

“I am thirsty for a sight of You, and I am tortured with anxiety; oh Transcendental Lord, have mercy on me.” (Asa M5, 431-3)

“Life is fruitful if the Lord is seen; oh dearest Beloved, have mercy and remove my delusion.” (Sarang M4, 1221-10)

I pray earnestly, O Beloved, I am ready to sacrifice my all for union with You even for a moment. Alas! How should I plead, that I may make You hear? I am tormented with restlessness because of my hunger and thirst to see You. The Lord can be realized by the Word of the Master. Oh Lord, I beg of You to enable me to realize the truth.

I pray most earnestly and I would sacrifice my life; wealth and honor would I forego for even a moment of union.”
(Belawal M5, 908-12)

“What should I ask for or say? I am hungry and thirsty to see You oh Nanak! He can be known by the Word of the Master.” (Suhi M1, 7621-9)

Oh Thou Eternal Great One! You are the faultless sustainer. I pray to You. Man lives in ignorance and does not remember the Lord, and in this way, wastes his life. Your creature always forgets. You, however, keep the honor of Your innate nature. Oh Helper of the worthless! How can I recite your virtues? What wisdom can an ignorant slave possess? This life and body are Your gifts. As we have taken refuge with You, You have saved us from the great fire of this world by taking us out of it. We rely and lean in confidence on You, and have

given up all other hopes. You are unknowable and limitless and unutterable. You cannot be described in words. Oh Lord! I have taken refuge with You, and You can protect me. I surrender my life and body to You. This is all Your kindness; otherwise who would know me? Whatever I have to say, I say to You. To whom else can I pray? Oh Lord! You will not find anyone more helpless than I, and none is more merciful than Yourself. We profess to be Yours, but are so in name only. Make us perfect.

“Oh Creator, pray hear my prayer, You are the great Merciful Sustainer.” (Tilang M1, 721-4)

“I remained ignorant and did not remember the Lord, and so wasted my life. Oh Nanak! He keeps the honor of His innate nature, though we always forget Him.” (Sorath M5, 633-16)

“Oh Forgiver of the worthless, how can I sing Your virtues? What wisdom can this ignorant slave display? This life and body are Yours.” (Suhi M5, 738-2)

“You saved us who took refuge with You by taking us out of the great fire. We have reliance and confidence in our hearts in You, and have no other hope.” (Suhi M5, 748-7)

“He is the great unknowable, limitless Lord. He cannot be described in words. Nanak has taken shelter with the Lord who can protect him.” (Jaitsri M5, 704-7)

“I pray to Thee, all my body and soul are Yours; Glory be to the Lord; oh Nanak, nobody else knows my name.” (Asa M5, 383-11)

“Whatever I have to do is according to Your Will; to whom else should I pray.” (Bharun M1, 1125-5)

“Oh Merciful Lord! You are our protector. There is no one else like You. How can we go anywhere else? I have confidence in Your words; fulfil them, I pray.” (Ravidas, Dhanasri, 694-6)

Oh Lord! You are my strength and my pillar of reliance, I therefore pray to You. I have nowhere else to go and no one else to pray to. All my pleasure and pain are with You. I am foolish and lowly. I am ignorant. I have taken shelter with You. Forgive me.

“I am mad; I pray to You, my Master; I have no other place to pray. My pleasure and pain are with You.” (Suhi M4, 735-2)

“The greatness of the Lord cannot be described; I am foolish, worldly and lowly; oh Lord and Master, forgive Nanak, the ignorant one. He has taken shelter with You.” (Suhi M4, 736-6)

We are foolish, unwise and ignorant. Oh Lord! We are without any merit, like the stones. Give us shelter through Your kindness. Oh Lord Hari! Be merciful, make us rise above the world, and grant us salvation through the Shabd. We are sinking in the quicksand of attachment. Oh Lord! Give us Your hand. Oh Merciful Lord! Do not look at our evil habits. How can one wash off the dirt and make himself clean? We human beings are so made.

“We are foolish, worldly and ignorant, and take shelter with You, the Unborn One; have compassion and save us, oh Lord; we, like the stones, have no merit.” (Belawal M4, 799-6)

“Oh Lord! Be merciful and redeem us; help the soul by means of the Shabd. We are sunk in the quagmire of attachment; oh Lord, give us Your hand to hold.” (Asa M4, 446)

“Have mercy on me, a helpless one, oh Bountiful Lord. Do not judge my merits and demerits. How can clay be washed clean? So is man made.” (Ramkali M5, 882-17)

Oh Lord of my life! I am an orphan and have taken shelter with You. Have mercy and compassion on me. In this deep well of attachment and delusion, my reason can do nothing. Pray, give me Your hand and save me. I have committed many sins. We are evil-minded and thieves. We have taken refuge with You. Save our honor, we beg of You.

“Have mercy, Oh Lord. I am an orphan and seek shelter with You; let me hold Thy hand in this dark well. My reason helps me not.” (Gauri M5, 208-13)

“We have committed many faults and sins. We are evil-doers and thieves, and have committed many thefts. Nanak has taken shelter with You. Oh Lord! Be merciful and save his honor.” (Gauri M5, 172-11)

Oh Lord! You are my Creator, unknowable and limitless. Hear my prayer. I am foolish. I am never awake. I am without beauty or reasoning power. I am separated from my home and have come to take shelter with You after a very long time. I have no money and no longer have the attraction of youth. I am an orphan. Protect me.

“Oh Protector, unknowable and limitless! hear my prayer; Nanak is foolish and never is he awake; he can see nothing, for the night is dark.” (Tukhari M1, 1110-3)

“I am without beauty or intellect, and come from a distant foreign land; I have no wealth or youthful attraction. Help the orphan, oh Lord.” (Gauri M3, 204-2)

I commit faults every moment. I cannot get free of this world because of my actions. You are the forgiver. Forgive me, and take me across this ocean. I make innumerable mistakes and am a great sinner. Oh Lord! Please forgive me. We have committed as many sins as there are drops of water in the ocean. We are stones, and will be drowned. Have mercy and compassion, and save us from drowning.

“We cannot escape from our actions, for we commit faults every moment; oh Forgiver! forgive us and take Nanak across the ocean.” (Gauri M5, 261-1)

“We commit mistakes which are innumerable; oh Lord! forgive me, I am a great sinner.” (Shalok M3, 1416-5)

“Like the drops of water in the ocean, there is no count of my sins. Have mercy and compassion, and save me from drowning like a stone.” (Gauri M5, 156)

All the world is burning in a deep and mysterious fire. Oh Lord! Have mercy and save it. Use the methods and devices that can save it.

“The world is burning; save it through Your mercy, save it by the methods by which it can be saved.” (Belawal M3, 853-10)

Oh Lord, You are unfathomable, limitless and beyond measure, and no one is Your equal. I pray that I may never forget You. You are the sustainer and are all-powerful. We pray for this boon, that Your feet may reside in our hearts.

You are unfathomable and limitless, oh most High. None is like you; this is our prayer, oh Lord! that we may not forget You. (Suhi M4, 747-6)

“Oh all-powerful provident Lord! I ask one boon of Thee; have mercy on Nanak, and let Thy feet dwell in his heart.” (Kalyan M4, 1321-6)

Oh Lord! All thoughts, whether good or bad, are in Thy control. We are merely instruments, and You are the director. Oh Creator! We act as You wish, and we have no say in the matter.

“Both good and bad thoughts are in Your control, oh Lord; we are instruments and You are the Director; oh Lord of Nanak! You are the Creator and we play as You wish.” (Belawal M4, 800-10)

Oh Lord! How can one serve Thee, and how or why can he be proud of such services! Thy Light is working in us, and we do everything in Thy Light. If Thou should withdraw Thy Light, what could one say or do?

“How can anyone serve You or be proud of such service? If You withdraw Your Light, how can one discourse on You?” (Belawal M3, 797-11)

Ask for the Lord Himself of the Lord. To ask for anything else is to ask for trouble on one's head. Oh Lord! Give us Your Name, so that we may gain peace and our hunger may be removed.

“To ask for anything other than Thyself is to ask for trouble on my head. Give me Thy Name, so that peace may enter into my heart and satisfy my hunger.” (Ramkali War M, 957-19)

A Muslim Saint has also said that we should ask the Lord for Himself alone and nothing else, since all else is perishable.

From God nothing but God should be asked; all else but Him is perishable. From God ask not for things which are going to perish; from God ask for nothing but Himself. Do not blacken your heart with false thoughts. (Maulana Rumi)

Ask the Master for the Lord

The Lord dwells in the Master. He dwells in Him in the form of the Sound Current. The Master is a God-man. Pray to the Lord, *“O Savior! You are merciful and compassionate. Be kind and lead us to a Master who will sustain our spirit, and through whom we may find You.”*

“You are merciful and compassionate; hear my prayer with Thy ever-attentive ear; connect my soul to the Master who has realized You, Oh Lord.” (Gauri M, 168-17)

Oh Lord! Have mercy, so that I may have faith in the Name and obtain refuge in a Perfect Master.

“Oh life-giving Lord! Give me faith in the Name; give Nanak the refuge of a Master who is a Perfect Adept.” (Kanra M4, 1310-16)

Oh Lord! Lead us to a Master by remembering whom we may obtain salvation, by seeing whom we may become happy, and for whom we would gladly die.

“Oh Lord! Lead us to a Holy Man, by remembering whom we may obtain salvation. May we feel happy on seeing Him, and may we gladly sacrifice ourselves for Him.” (Bhairon M4, 1135-8)

We should pray to the Lord and the Master to give us the opportunity to see them, to seek refuge with them, to get from them the Name, to have their help in escaping from the snares of the sense pleasures, and to aid us in crossing the ocean of the world. They are all-powerful and can grant us anything they wish.

In addition, the devotee should ask them that he may live as they wish him to. We are without virtues, unwise, uninformed and ignorant. We do not know what to do. Oh Lord! Have mercy, make us sing Your praises so that we may live according to Your Will.

“Virtueless, unwise, uninformed, ignorant are we, and we know not what to do. Have mercy on Nanak, so that he may sing Your praises.” (Suhi M5, 748-17)

In addition to this, we should also pray that we may remember Him and be devoted to Him.

“He who remembers the Formless One, his delusion disappears. He who is dyed in Your hue is freed from transmigration.” (Gujri War M5, 523-8)

“Oh Lord! After wandering for many ages, I have taken refuge with You. Oh Lord! Hear Nanak and give him devotion for You.” (Gauri M5, 289-9)

Also pray to hear the Sound or Shabd, the Lord's Nectar and Name, for they are the principal means of reaching the Lord.

“We are Your humble devotees; give us the Nectar of the Name Oh Beloved Master! Unite me to the all-wise Lord.” (Maru M4, 997-5)

“Forgive the sinner, oh Lord, and unite him to You; You are limitless; no one can discuss Your limits. You are known through the Shabd within the body.” (Parbhati M3, 1333-6)

“Oh virtuous Lord and Creator! How can I praise you? Hear the prayers of the devotees and give the Nectar of the Name.” (Suhi M5, 784-6)

“We are beggars at Your door, O bountiful One; be pleased to give the Name which will give us bliss.” (Dhanasri M3, 666-10)

“Oh Lord! Save us, we pray; we can do nothing of ourselves; have mercy and give us Your Name.” (Dhanasri M5, 675-11)

In this Kal Yug (Iron Age) singing the praises of the Shabd is very beneficial.

“In Kalyuga sing the Shabd; by this devotion, pride is removed.” (Asa M3, 424-1)

By singing the Name, the soul gains strength and pride disappears. One should, therefore, mentally pray for His remembrance and meditate on Him.

“I wish to make an effort every morning that I may enjoy the ambrosia of singing the praises of the Lord. Oh Lord, bestow this boon on Nanak.” (Gujri M5, 519-8)

Praying that one may dwell at the feet of the Master and may get the dust of His holy feet (His spiritual love and power) is also enjoined by the Saints.

“May I get the company of the Master, and be dyed in love of the Name. Oh Lord, have mercy on Nanak and let Thy feet dwell in his heart.” (Bihagara M5, 545-2)

“Have compassion, oh Merciful Lord; give to Nanak the company of Saints.” (Gauri M3, 194-19)

“Oh Lord, accept us as Your slaves. Give us the dust of the feet of the Saints as long as we live.”
(Kalyan M4, 1326-9)

The Gurus give examples of prayers for removing dangers to the devotees, and prayers for fulfilling their needs are also given. They are referred to here so that the reader can derive benefit by reading them.

Examples of Prayers

Man has a body and a soul. The soul is as valuable in the body as is a beautiful pearl in a shell. Saints recommend prayers of several kinds. There are some who ask the Lord for the necessities of life so that after satisfying these needs they may give devotion to the Lord. The words *“Give us this day our daily bread”* occur in the Lord's Prayer.

Saints consider that everything belongs to the Lord and pray for daily necessities so that after satisfying the needs of the body full devotion may be given to the Lord. The needs of the horse of this body should be satisfied first, and the needs of the soul should be looked after thereafter. Kabir Sahib says that hunger interferes with one's prayers. Therefore one should satisfy one's hunger with a crust of bread and then engage in prayer.

“Oh Kabir, hunger interferes with prayer; first take a crust of bread, and then engage in remembrance.”

The Master says that it is proper for a devotee to ask for his needs in the beginning. Kabir prayed, *“Oh Lord! I cannot pray while hungry. I therefore ask for two pounds of flour every day.”* He also prayed for half-a-pound of pulse, so as to provide for both of his daily meals. He also made a request for a cot, a pillow, a bedding and a quilt, so that he could be free to engage, in devotion. But he did not ask for these out of greed, for he loved the Name Only.

“I cannot engage in devotion while hungry, Oh Lord. Please take back your rosary.”
(Kabir Sorath 656-12)

“Pray give me two pounds of flour, and a little butter and salt. I ask for half-a-pound of pulse, so that I may have both of my daily meals. Give a cot, a pillow and also a quilt to cover myself, so that I may be free to remember You. I am not avaricious; I love Your Name alone.”
(Kabir Sorath 656-15)

Dhanna Bhagat similarly prays, *“Oh Lord! I adore You. You do all the work of Your devotees. I ask for pulse, flour and butter, so that I may be happy after taking them. I also ask for good clothes and shoes, as well as cereals. I also wish for a milk-giving cow and a buffalo. There should be a good mare to ride, and an obedient and sympathetic wife.”*

“Oh Lord! I adore Thee. You see to it that all the actions of Your devotees are successful. Give pulses, salt and butter, so that I may be happy every day; give good shoes to wear, and seven kinds of cereals; a cow and a buffalo to give milk, and a mare to ride. Dhanna also asks for a good wife.” (Dhanna, Dhanasri, 695-16)

Saints and Adepts, while knowing fully well that the Lord knows one's needs, have given us some examples of prayers so that we may act in accordance with them.

The Tenth Guru (Gobind Singh Sahib) prayed for Grace for His family and His disciples. He prayed, *“Oh Lord! Give us Your hand and protect us. Fulfill our desires, so that our mind may rest at Your feet. Consider us Your own, and look after us. Destroy all our enemies. Save me, Oh Creator. I pray that my family, servants and disciples should be happy. Take my servants and disciples across the ocean of this universe, and destroy our foes.”*

“How should I pray? Protect us by giving us Your hand. Let our desires be fulfilled. May our minds rest at Your feet. Consider us as Your servants and protect us. Drive away all our enemies. Save me by Your own hand. Oh Creator! May my family live happily and also all my servants and disciples. Give salvation to my servants and disciples, and destroy each one of my foes.”

Lord's Prayer

Jesus Christ prayed:

“Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy Will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive as our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil; for Thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory for ever and ever.”

The followers of Mahatma Buddha do not believe in prayers, but if their religion is examined closely, it will be found that they have also accepted the reality behind prayer. When they sit after bathing and cleaning themselves in the morning and evening, they send out good wishes of the following kind: *“I wish the good of all the universe. May all living beings, whether below or above, whether on the left or the right, prosper. May all living beings in heaven, earth, the nether worlds and hell, have peace and goodwill.”* They do not ask for anything but simply send out their good wishes for the good and welfare of the entire universe, and the good of all is wished for. Real prayer, consists in wishing for the good of all.

Hindus also pray. There are prayers in the Vedas which ask for physical and daily necessities. One of these is:

“Oh Sustainer, Lord of the paths, we have yoked Thee to our chariot through our prayers so that we may attain success and salvation. Bestow upon us that wealth that men yearn for. Grant us the company of the courageous, the philanthropic and the compassionate Giver of food. Oh powerful Deity, throw open the path that we may obtain food, that we may destroy our foes, that we may fulfill our desires. Oh Wise Deity, pierce the hearts of the avaricious with Your armour and make them subject to us.” (Rig Veda, Mandal 6, Sukt 53)

In their daily ritual, the Hindus pray as follows:

“Brahm (the Lord) who is the eye of the entire universe and the well-wisher of all, and who is pure and free from worldly blemish, is before us. May we see Him (His Light) for a hundred years. May we live for Him a hundred years. May we hear Him (the Shabd) for a hundred years. May we sing His glories and through His Mercy be free a hundred years, and may this state last for over a hundred years.”

The Gayatri Mantra is nothing but a prayer. The Muslims pray:

“God is one. God is detached from all. He gave birth to none. Of none is He born. He has no equal. Show us the right path.”

Similarly, the Jains also pray. In all these prayers we are reminded of the ideal and of our ultimate destination, which is to realize the Lord. In the Vedanta, prayer consists in hearing and meditating and contemplating on the great saying (maha vakyas). Hafiz Sahib prays to his Master in the ecstasy of his devotion:

“Oh Master, I am poor while You are the helper of the poor. I have been separated from the Original Home for a very long time. Have pity on my condition and take me back to the Original Home. Your intention was to show the miracle of Thy wonderful beauty; otherwise, in all his glory and wealth, what need had Sultan Mahmud for the tresses of (his slave) Aiyaz?”

Oh Master! I am poor, and You are the helper. I have been separated from my Original Home for many ages. Have mercy and take me with You to the Original Home. I am drawn to You because of Your incomparable beauty; without You I am nothing. This is the reason why Sultan Mahmud was so kind to his slave (Aiyaz). Hafiz further says:

“I have only the desire to serve at Your door; oh Lord, have mercy on Your slave, and give him a kindly glance.”

Shamas-i-Tabrez prays to the Master:

“Oh Master, by bestowing the wine of homelessness which leads to the indescribable, You have turned the travelers into wine servers, (transformed them into adepts). Close my fault-finding eyes and give the Inner Eyes which can see the Reality.”

He again says:

“You are as Mount Caucasus is to the eagle; You are as light is to the moth; open the fountain of life-giving elixir all around me, and recreate the old legends. Intoxicate me with the wine of love and put my wandering and faithless mind in Thy service. For a while enter the mosque of my heart. Come and adorn this humble abode.”

Oh Lord and Master! Just as Mount Caucasus is the home of the king eagle, You are the resting place of the bird of my soul. Were I a moth, You would be the candle in the flame of which I would sacrifice myself. Oh Merciful One, shower Thy Elixir all round about me, so that the stories about the Pool of Nectar, the Rain or the Water of Life, and the Fountain of Life-giving Water may come true. Give me the intoxication of love, and bridle the unruly intellect in the service of the Lord. My last prayer is that You should appear in the mosque of my body, so that my humble cottage may feel honored and become pure.

Kabir's Prayer

I pray with folded hands, listen to me, oh Merciful Master. Give me peace and the company of Saints; also humility, poverty and knowledge.

Kabir makes this prayer while thinking of your holy feet. Show me the true path of the Saints, oh Master. How can I utter a word of prayer? I am ashamed of myself. I sin before your eyes. How can You love me? I am full of faults and You are faultless; You are virtuous and I am a sinner.

Even if I forget You, pray, forget me not. Oh Lord, forget me not, though You can have thousands of others. You can get many like me; but I cannot get any other like You. How can I forget You? I have nowhere else to go.

My mind cares not for Shiva or Muni Narad. If I forget You by mistake, pray, do not take it to heart. The Master should love the poor. A man errs daily. Oh Kabir, why have you foolishly made yourself wretched by thinking of your faults?

A man is helpless and dependent, and it is only the Lord who looks to his good. Sins I have committed many within no time at all. And You may pardon me or punish me as You like.

Oh forgive me, pardon me, spare me, oh helper of the poor. I am an undutiful son, but my father is jealous of my honor.

Oh Lord, You are full of virtues and have no faults. When I searched my heart I found there every fault. I have not a single virtue; listen, oh King of Saints, by the Grace of Your Name I will have a place of honor. I am false, while the Lord is true: I am full of sins. I am a born sinner, full of all defects. I am a sinful soul, oh Lord; pray, save me. You, the bountiful remover of sufferings, pray, look after me.

Help me, oh Lord, I am in deep waters. By myself I would be carried away; hold me by the hand. I believe I have no love in my mind, and I do not have a beautiful body. I do not know how I could survive without the Lord. If I meet the Lord in this life, I will tell Him all my troubles while I weep. I will place my head on His feet, and say what I have to say.

You know the inner thoughts of all, and are the support of the universe. If You let go my hand, who would take me across? The ocean of the universe is very deep, unknowable and unfathomable. Oh Merciful Lord, if You have compassion, can I feel its depth?

I am a great sinner, and am very hard of heart. Oh powerful Master, You alone can take me to my resting place. You are all-powerful, my Lord, pray hold me firmly by the arm. Take me to my destination, and leave me not by the wayside.

Give me the boon of devotion, oh Master and God of gods, I wish for nothing else except Thy daily service. I am drowning in the middle of the stream; hold me and take me across.

Prayer Before the Master in Sar Bachan

O Master, open the door of the heart. The mind has tried and tried and failed; not once has it succeeded. You are all-powerful and lacking nothing, why do You delay?

I am tossed between pain and pleasure; why have I not yet had a chance? Have mercy, O Bountiful One! Take my mind and attention to the skies.

The mind is evil and does not long for You; give me the boon of love. The mind asks for false comforts, and does not know the reality.

It hankers after worldly pleasures, and does not taste the Nectar of the Sound. What should I tell the mind, and how should I persuade it? It does not take to heart the words of the Master.

The mind is strangely made; it does not love and care for the Shabd. How can it escape the cycle of eighty-four? It does not repeat the Name of the Master. I will be buffeted in this world, and will be dragged headlong to the regions of death.

I have borne these sufferings for a long time. The mind does not heed and has forgotten. You are the moving spirit in all hearts, O Master, why do You not call this sufferer to You?

Except for You I have no other; You alone can take me to the Eternal Abode. Have mercy, O Radha Soami, and take me to the other shore.

I may now commit an unwise action, I am a stranger in a strange land. Set me on the right path in this life, I bow at Your feet every day.

I repeat and feel remorse in my mind, how am I to join my Lord? I live on earth while my Lord is in the skies, without my Beloved I remain depressed.

O Master, hear my prayer, Kal has entangled me in his meshes. I am helpless and wretched and cry to You, O Master, hear my prayer. You are merciful and provide for everyone. I am the only unfortunate one who is full of sufferings.

What can I say about my pains? It is as if I were pierced by the point of an arrow. You, O Master, have now given me hope that I may fly in the sky with the wings of love. By Your mercy I have met my Lord, all pain is gone and my heart is free of troubles.

O Master, hear my prayer, I pray again and again. Remove my evil thoughts. Give me shelter at Your feet.

Take me across the ocean of this universe, my boat is in the middle of the stream. There is no support but You. Make me Your own and support me.

I am cunning and a hypocrite but Yours. You are the limitless Bountiful Lord. I am helpless and extremely wretched, pray, free me whenever You please.

I kneel and beg before You, I surrender my mind and body and soul to You, and have now found a great support. I am lowly, uninformed and unskilled.

You have placed the secret of the Sound in the heart. The immoral mind did not find it tasteful. I have been deluded by pleasure and pain. I hanker after worldly honor.

How can I reverse the actions of the mind without help given by You, my Master? O Radha Soami, draw up the mind, I make this earnest plea to You.

I ask a boon of the Master. Pray, let the Shabd manifest itself in my heart. The mind always leads to delusion. Pray, rid my mind of all actions, that the soul may rise and hear the Melody.

Control the mind and make it actionless, so that all actions, good and bad, may cease. That I may hear the Shabd at the proper place, pray, make me mad after the Name, that I may reach the goal of Shabd, that none may cause me injury, that I may die for You.

Pray, do not let me drift with the current of Kal, but give me the honor of the Shabd. The mind is very unruly; I take shelter at the feet of Radha Soami.

O Lord, pray, take me to Your Home for I am idle and deluded. O Merciful One! pray, hold me, I do not know what sins I have committed.

My soul does not yet love the Name; what am I to do? The mind does not remain at rest, O Merciful One, have compassion on me, I am wretched all the time.

The soul does not rise, and the mind is not calm. I do not get the benefit of Shabd. The path of the Master is said to be high; so I follow it. Why do the Saints not help me?

The path of the Saints will be put to shame if I do not succeed in full. I make this prayer according to my own will, for I am not aware of what Your wish may be.

I cry again and again, hear me, and give me Your own Name. When Radha Soami gives His own Name, a sufferer may take rest.

“How am I to be freed from the mind?” says the soul to the mind. It has cast the net of pleasures. It has separated me from the Original Home.

I am in the bondage of the ten senses, and they have all deceived me. I am surrounded by the nine desires; I have been cast out of the tenth door.

Now I am attached to the sense pleasures, how can I escape from this snare? I see no one but the Master who can take me out of this jungle.

I tremble because of death; who can free me from this fear? From a human being I have become a beast. I have not loved the Master.

Like a broken branch from a tree, I am lying far from my Original Home. I humbly beg the Master with all earnestness, keep me at Your feet.

Cleanse me of dirt by Your company, so that I may feel separate from the body. I may then unite with the Melody of Sunn (spiritual region). I may get the Nectar from the jar.

When the Master unites me with the Shabd, suffering is removed and no fear remains. I am connected to the Sound Current. I may love the Lord. O Radha Soami, make me Your own, I have taken refuge with You.

Prayer of Mira Bai

You redeemed Ajamil, the sinner, You redeemed Sadna, You saved the elephant from drowning, the courtesan rode the air chariot, and You redeemed many other sinners, the wise Saints say this is so.

You redeemed the lowly forest woman and Kubja, this is known to all the world. How can I mention all? They are a legion. Even the Vedas and Purans have failed to accomplish this. Oh Lord! Mira has taken shelter with You; hear this with both Thy ears.

I have suffered greatly in this world, doubt and sorrow have tortured me. Now have compassion on me, remove my suffering and take me across.

All this world is drifting in the current of the eighty-four; oh Merciful Lord of Mira, pray, end the transmigration.

I feel no rest without meeting You, my heart feels it so. I rise high and see the Path, by weeping all through the night.

This world is all illusion, family and relations are all false. I pray with folded hands, oh hear my prayer!

This mind of mine is very unruly, like a wild elephant running amok; the Master has placed His hand on its head, and is trying to persuade it by force.

Mira's Lord is merciful, she has united her heart to His feet. I look at Your Form every moment, on seeing You, I feel happy.

My intellect is robbing me, however hard I try to direct my mind; I try to control the mind, oh Lord, but I am helpless and dying; oh, come soon to me, my Lord,

Each day I hear religious discourses, but still I am afraid of the evil mind. Without fail I always serve the Holy Men, and I busy myself in remembrance and contemplation. Pray, show Thy slave the path of devotion, oh Lord, make Mira Your true devoted slave.

My friends have turned into foes, I am disliked by all. I have no friend but You, my boat is tossing in the sea. I have no rest all day or sleep at night, I stand alone and wither.

My heart is pierced by the arrows of separation, I cannot forget this even for a moment.

You redeemed Ahilya who had turned into stone and was lying in the forest. Mira is overburdened with sorrows. I have met the Perfect Master, Ravi Das. He came from our Original Home in the heavens. When the Master showed me the world within, Light merged into Light.

I am drifting on the ocean of this world, take me out of it, I beg You. There is no friend in this ocean, the only true friend is the Lord. Father, mother and family members, all have their own ends to serve. Oh Lord! Hear the prayer of Mira, be pleased to give her a place at Your feet.

Prayer of Dharam Das

Oh Master, Lord of Lords, give me the boon of devotion; may I never forget to serve the feet of the Master while I live. I do not fast, or go on pilgrimage, or worship in a temple; I am controlling my mind, my speech and my actions.

The eight kinds of Sidhis, the nine kinds of Ridhis (occult powers) or dwelling place in heaven, these I ask not, oh my powerful and bountiful Lord. Articles of comfort, family, wealth and a beautiful wife in my home, these I do not desire even in dream, I swear by You, my Master.

Hear the prayer of Dharam Das, oh powerful Lord; free him from transmigration and make him Your own.

Prayer of Surdas

Oh save me, my Lord; I am sitting unprotected on the branch of a tree. The hunter (Karm Dev) has his arrow pointed at me. I want to escape him, but a falcon is hovering over me. I am between two dangers, oh Merciful Lord, who is to save me?

As soon as I remembered You, a serpent stung the hunter and the arrow struck the falcon. How can Surdas praise Your virtues? All glory to You, oh Merciful Lord.

Save my honor, oh Lord; You know all. I have earned no merit. I cannot give up evil deeds even for a moment, what to say of hours; I bear on my head the burden of hypocrisy. To wife, son and wealth am I attached, and I have lost my senses. Redeem Surdas the sinner, my boat is full to the brim.



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