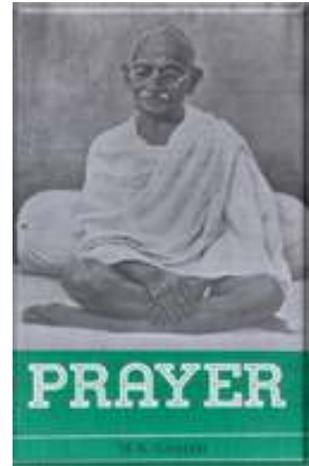


# Prayer

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Prayerfully to  
My Maternal Uncle

Late Sjt. Hiralal Tribhuvandas Parekh  
Asst. Secretary, Gujarat Vernacular Society  
(Present Gujarat Vidyasabha)

## TO THE READER

I would like to say to the diligent reader of my writings and to others who are interested in them that I am not at all concerned with appearing to be consistent. In my search after Truth I have discarded many ideas and learnt many new things. Old as I am in age, I have no feeling that I have ceased to grow inwardly or that my growth will stop at the dissolution of the flesh. What I am concerned with is my readiness to obey the call of Truth, my God, from moment to moment, and, therefore, when anybody finds any inconsistency between any two writings of mine, if he has still faith in my sanity, he would do well to choose the later of the two on the same subject.

M. K. GANDHI

*Harijan, 24-4-'33, p. 2*

## LORD OF HUMILITY

*Lord of humility, dwelling in the  
little pariah hut  
help us to reach for Thee throughout  
that fair land  
watered by Ganges, Brahmaputra  
and Jamuna.*

*Give us receptiveness, give us open-heartedness,  
give us Thy humility, give us  
the ability and willingness  
to identify ourselves with the  
masses of India.*

*O God, who does help only when man  
feels utterly humble,  
grant that we may not be  
isolated from the people  
we would serve as servants and friends.  
Let us be embodiments of self-sacrifice,  
embodiments of godliness,  
humility personified, that we  
may know the land better  
and love it more.*

*Harijan, 11-9-'49, p. 217*

*It is my constant prayer that I may never have a feeling of anger against my traducers, that even if I fall a victim to an assassin's bullet, I may deliver my soul with the remembrance of God upon my lips.*

## I. MEANING OF AND NECESSITY FOR PRAYER

*Prayer is nothing else but an intense longing of the heart. You may express yourself through the lips; you may express yourself in the private closet or in the public; but to be genuine, the expression must come from the deepest recesses of the heart.*

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*There is an eternal struggle raging in man's breast between the powers of darkness and of light, and who has not the sheet-anchor of prayer to rely upon will be a victim to the powers of darkness.*

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*Begin, therefore, your day with prayer, and make it so soulful that it may remain with you until the evening. Close the day with prayer so that you may have a peaceful night free from dreams and nightmares.*

## 01. MEANING OF AND NECESSITY FOR PRAYER

(From "A Discourse on Prayer " by M.D.)

I am glad that you all want me to speak to you on the meaning of and the necessity for prayer. I believe that prayer is the very soul and essence of religion, and, therefore, prayer must be the very core of the life of man, for no man can live without religion. There are some who in the egotism of their reason declare that they have nothing to do with religion. But it is like a man saying that he breathes but that he has no nose. Whether by reason, or by instinct, or by superstition, man acknowledges some sort of relationship with the divine. The rankest agnostic or atheist does acknowledge the need of a moral principle, and associates something good with its observance and something bad with its non-observance. Bradlaugh, whose atheism is well known, always insisted on proclaiming his innermost conviction. He had to suffer a lot for thus speaking the truth, but he delighted in it and said that truth is its own reward. Not that he was quite insensible to the joy resulting from the observance of truth. This joy, however, is not at all worldly, but springs out of communion with the divine. That is why I have said that even a man who disowns religion cannot and does not live without religion.

Now I come to the next thing, viz., that prayer is the very core of man's life, as it is the most vital part of religion. Prayer is either petitional or in its wider sense is inward communion. In either case the ultimate result is the same. Even when it is petitional, the petition should be for the cleansing and purification of the soul, for freeing it from the layers of ignorance and darkness that envelop it. He, therefore, who hungers for the awakening of the divine in him must fall back on prayer. But prayer is no mere exercise of words or of the ears, it is no mere repetition of empty formula. Any amount of repetition of Ramanama is futile if it fails to stir the soul. It is better in prayer to have a heart without words than words without a heart. It must be in clear response to the spirit which hungers for it. And even as a hungry man relishes a hearty meal, a hungry soul will relish a heart-felt prayer. And I am giving you a bit of my experience

and that of my companions when I say that he who has experienced the magic of prayer may do without food for days together but not a single moment without prayer. For without prayer there is no inward peace.

If that is the case, someone will say, we should be offering our prayers every minute of our lives. There is no doubt about it, but we, erring mortals, who find it difficult to retire within ourselves for inward communion even for a single moment, will find it impossible to remain perpetually in communion with the divine. We, therefore, fix some hours when we make a serious effort to throw off the attachments of the world for a while, we make a serious endeavour to remain, so to say, out of the flesh. You have heard Surdas' hymn. It is the passionate cry of a soul hungering for union with the divine. According to our standards he was a saint, but according to his own he was a proclaimed sinner. Spiritually he was miles ahead of us, but he felt the separation from the divine so keenly that he has uttered that anguished cry in loathing and despair.

I have talked of the necessity for prayer, and there through I have dealt with the essence of prayer. We are born to serve our fellowmen, and we cannot properly do so unless we are wide awake. There is an eternal struggle raging in man's breast between the powers of darkness and of light, and he who has not the sheet-anchor of prayer to rely upon will be a victim to the powers of darkness. The man of prayer will be at peace with himself and with the whole world, the man who goes about the affairs of the world without a prayerful heart will be miserable and will make the world also miserable. Apart therefore from its bearing on man's condition after death, prayer has incalculable value for man in this world of the living. Prayer is the only means of bringing about orderliness and peace and repose in our daily acts. We inmates of the Ashram who came here in search of truth and for insistence on truth professed to believe in the efficacy of prayers, but had never up to now made it a matter of vital concern. We did not bestow on it the care that we did on other matters. I woke from my slumbers one day and realized that I had been woefully negligent of my duty in the matter. I have, therefore, suggested measures of stern discipline and far from being any the worse, I hope we are the" better for it.

For it is so obvious. Take care of the vital thing and other things will take care of themselves. Rectify one angle of a square, and the other angles will be automatically right.

Begin, therefore, your day with prayer, and make it so soulful that it may remain with you until the evening. Close the day with prayer so that you may have a peaceful night free from dreams and nightmares. Do not worry about the form of prayer. Let it be any form, it should be such as can put us into communion with the divine. Only, whatever be the form, let not the spirit wander while the words of prayer run on out of your mouth.

If what I have said has gone home to you, you will not be at peace until you have compelled your hostel superintendents to interest themselves in your prayer and to make it obligatory. Restraint self-imposed is no compulsion. A man, who chooses the path of freedom from restraint, i.e. of self-indulgence, will be a bond slave of passions, whilst the man who binds himself to rules and restraints releases himself. All things in the universe, including the sun and the moon and the stars, obey certain laws. Without the restraining influence of these laws the world would not go on for a single moment. You, whose mission in life is service of your fellowmen, will go to pieces if you do not impose on yourselves some sort of discipline, and prayer is a necessary spiritual discipline. It is discipline and restraint that separates us from the brute. If we will be men walking with our heads erect and not walking on all fours, let us understand and put ourselves under voluntary discipline and restraint.

*Young India*, 23-1-'30, p. 25

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(From "Speech at Ramjas College, Delhi")

When the mind is full of prayerful thoughts, everything in the world seems good and agreeable. Prayer is essential for progress in life.

*The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi— XXV*, (1967), p. 321

## 02. PRAYER IS NECESSARY FOR ALL

(From a Letter)

In my opinion all selfless service leads to self-purification. Economic and moral development should go hand in hand. *Atma* is that which animates the body. Realization comes through purification. Prayer is necessary for all, if food is.

*Mahadevbhaini Diary, Vol. 2 (Gujarati Edn., 1949), p. 114*

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(From "Discourses on the *Gita*")

Man's need for prayer is as great as his need for bread. A bad man will use his ears to hear evil of others and see sinful things, but the good man says that, had he a thousand eyes and ears, he would use them to contemplate the vision of God for ever and to hear devotional songs, and employ his five thousand tongues to sing His praises. It is only after I have prayed here every day that I feel the bliss of having tasted the *amrita* of knowledge. For that man who wishes to be a real human being, *dal* and *roti* are not his food. They count little to him. His real food is prayer.

*The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi—XXXII, (1969), p. 219-20*

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(From a Letter)

There can be no manner of doubt that this universe of sentient beings is governed by a Law. If you can think of Law without its Giver, I would say that the Law is the Law-giver, that is God. When we pray to the Law we simply yearn after knowing the Law and obeying it. We become what we yearn after. Hence the necessity for prayer.

*The Diary of Mqhadev Desai, Vol. I, (1953), p. 222*

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(From "Letter to Premabehn Katak")

The necessity of prayers is a matter of universal experience. If you have faith in them, you will feel interest in them.

*The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi—XLIV, (1971), p. 85*

### 03. MAN CANNOT LIVE WITHOUT PRAYER

(From "Weekly Letter" by M.D.)

As food is necessary for the body, prayer is necessary for the soul. A man may be able to do without food for a number of days—as Macswinney did for over 70 days— but, believing in God, man cannot, should not, live a moment without prayer. You will say that we see lots of people living without prayer. I dare say they do, but it is the existence of the brute which, for man, is worse than death. I have not the shadow of a doubt that the strife and quarrels with which our atmosphere is so full today are due to the absence of the spirit of true prayer. You will demur to the statement, I know, and contend that millions of Hindus, Musalmans and Christians do offer their prayers. It is because I had thought you would raise the objection that I used the words 'true prayer'.

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#### Hypocrisy of Lip-prayer

The fact is, we have been offering our prayers with the lips but hardly ever with our hearts, and it is to escape, if possible, the hypocrisy of the lip-prayer, that we in the Ashram repeat every evening the last verses of the second chapter of the *Bhagavadgita*. The condition of the 'Equable in Spirit' that is described in those verses, if we contemplate them daily, is bound slowly to turn our hearts towards God. If you would base your education on the true foundation of a pure character and pure heart, there is nothing so helpful as to offer your prayers every day, truly and religiously.

*Young India*, 15-12-'27, p. 424

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(From a prayer speech: July 14, 1945)

Prayer is even more essential for the well-being of the soul than is food for the maintenance of the body. It becomes necessary to give up food on occasions in order to benefit the body. But prayer may never be abandoned. If we provide food for the body which is perishable, then, surely, it is our primary duty to

provide food for the soul which is imperishable, and such sustenance is found in prayer. The real meaning of prayer is devoted worship.

*Food for the Soul*, (1957), pp. 59-60

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(From "Sermon at Kingsley Hall")

If we believed in God, . . ., it followed that we must pray to Him. Though prayer, it was said, was to the soul what food was to the body, yet prayer was far more important for the soul than food was for the body, because we could at times go without food and the body would feel the better for the fast, but there was no such thing as prayer-fast. . . .

We can over-indulge in food. But we can never overindulge in prayer.

*The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi—XLVIII* (1972), p.11

#### 04. THE ETERNAL DUEL

A friend writes:

"In the article entitled "The Tangle of Ahimsa" appearing in *Young India* of October 11<sup>th</sup>, you have stated most forcefully that cowardice and Ahimsa are incompatible. There is not an ambiguous syllable in your statement. But may I request that you tell us how cowardice can be exorcised from a man's character? I notice that all characters are but the sum total of habits formed. How are we to undo our old habits and build the new ones of courage, intelligence and action? I am convinced that habits can be destroyed, and better and nobler habits can be formed giving birth to a new character in a person. It seems to me that you know prayers, discipline and studies by which a man can attain a second birth. Won't you kindly tell us about them? Do give us your knowledge and advice in one of the numbers of *Young India*. Please help us by giving an account of the method of praying and working by which a man can recreate himself."

The question refers to the eternal duel that is so graphically described in the Mahabharata under the cloak of history and that is every day going on in millions of breasts. Man's destined purpose is to conquer old habits, to overcome the evil in him and to restore good to its rightful place. If religion does not teach us how to achieve this conquest, it teaches us nothing. But there is no royal road to success in this, the truest enterprise in life. Cowardice is perhaps the greatest vice from which we suffer and is also possibly the greatest violence, certainly far greater than bloodshed and the like that generally go under the name of violence. For it comes from want of faith in God and ignorance of His attributes. But I am sorry that I have not the ability to give 'the knowledge and the advice' that the correspondent would have me to give on how to dispel cowardice and other vices. But I can give my own testimony and say that a heart-felt prayer is undoubtedly the most potent instrument that man possesses for overcoming cowardice and all other bad old habits. Prayer is an impossibility without a living faith in the presence of God within.

Christianity and Islam describe the same process as a duel between God and Satan, not outside but within; Zoroastrianism as a duel between Ahurmazd and Ahriman; Hinduism as a duel between forces of good and forces of evil. We have to make our choice whether we should ally ourselves with the forces of evil or with the forces of good. And to pray to God is nothing but that sacred alliance between God and man whereby he attains his deliverance from the clutches of the prince of darkness. But a heartfelt prayer is not a recitation with the lips. It is a yearning from within which expresses itself in every word, every act, nay, every thought of man. When an evil thought successfully assails him, he may know that he offered but a hp prayer and similarly with regard to an evil word escaping his lips or an evil act done by him. Real prayer is an absolute shield and protection against this trinity of evils. Success does not always attend the very first effort at such real living prayer. We have to strive against ourselves, we have to believe in spite of ourselves, because months are as our years. We have, therefore, to cultivate illimitable patience if we will realise the efficacy of prayer. There will be darkness, disappointment and even worse; but we must have courage enough to battle against all these and not succumb to cowardice. There is no such thing as retreat for a man of prayer.

What I am relating is not a fairy tale. I have not drawn an imaginary picture. I have summed up the testimony of men who have by prayer conquered every difficulty in their upward progress, and I have added my own humble testimony that the more I live the more I realize how much I owe to faith and prayer which is one and the same thing for me. And I am quoting an experience not limited to a few hours, or days or weeks, but extending over an unbroken period of nearly 40 years. I have had my share of disappointments, uttermost darkness, counsels of despair, counsels of caution, subtlest assaults of pride; but I am able to say that my faith,—and I know that it is still little enough, by no means as great as I want it to be,— has ultimately conquered every one of these difficulties up to now. If we have faith in us, if we have a prayerful heart, we may not tempt God, may not make terms with Him. We must reduce ourselves to a cipher. Barodada<sup>1</sup> sent me a precious Sanskrit verse not long before his death. It means impliedly that a man of devotion reduces himself to

zero. Not until we have reduced ourselves to nothingness can we conquer the evil in us. God demands nothing less than complete self-surrender as the price for the only real freedom that is worth having. And when a man thus loses himself, he immediately finds himself in the service of all that lives. It becomes his delight and his recreation. He is a new man never weary of spending himself in the service of God's creation.

*Young India*, 20-12-'28, p. 420

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1 Elder brother of Poet Rabindranath Tagore.

## 05. WHAT IS PRAYER?

A medical graduate asks:

"What is the best form of prayer? How much time should be spent at it? In my opinion to do justice is the best form of prayer and one who is sincere about doing justice to all, does not need to do any more praying. Some people spend a long time over *sandhya* and 95% of them do not understand the meaning of what they say. In my opinion, prayer should be said in one's mother-tongue. It alone can affect the soul best. I should say that a sincere prayer for one minute is enough. It should suffice to promise God not to sin."

Prayer means asking God for something in a reverent attitude. But the word is used also to denote any devotional act. Worship is a better term to use for what the correspondent has in mind. But definition apart, what is it that millions of Hindus, Musalmans, Christians and Jews and others do every day during the time set apart for the adoration of the Maker? It seems to me that it is a yearning of the heart to be one with the Maker, an invocation for His blessing. It is in this case the attitude that matters, not words uttered or muttered.

And often the association of words that have been handed down from ancient times has an effect which in their rendering into one's mother-tongue they will lose altogether. Thus the Gayatri translated and recited in, say, Gujarati, will not have the same effect as the original. The utterance of the word Rama will instantaneously affect millions of Hindus, when the word God, although they may understand the meaning, will leave them untouched. Words after all acquire a power by long usage and sacredness associated with their use. There is much, therefore, to be said for the retention of old Sanskrit formulae (the most prevalent *mantras* or verses. That the meaning of them should be properly understood goes without saying.

There can be no fixed rule laid down as to the time these devotional acts should take. It depends upon individual temperament. These are precious moments in one's daily life. The exercises are intended to sober and humble us

and enable us to realize that nothing happens without His will and that we are but 'clay in the hands of the Potter'. These are moments when one reviews one's immediate past, confesses one's weakness, asks for forgiveness and strength to be and do better. One minute may be enough for some, twenty-four hours may be too little for others.

For those who are filled with the presence of God in them, to labour is to pray. Their life is one continuous prayer or act of worship. For those others who act only to sin, to indulge themselves, and live for self, no time is too much. If they had patience and faith and the will to be pure, they would pray till they feel the definite purifying presence of God within them.

For us, ordinary mortals, there must be a middle path between these two extremes. We are not so exalted as to be able to say that all our acts are a dedication, nor perhaps are we so far gone as to be living purely for self. Hence have all religions set apart times for general devotion. Unfortunately these have nowadays become merely mechanical and formal, where they are not hypocritical. What is necessary, therefore, is the correct attitude to accompany these devotions.

For definite personal prayer in the sense of asking God for something, it should certainly be in one's own tongue. Nothing can be grander than to ask God to make us act justly towards everything that lives.

*Young India*, 10-6-'26, p. 211

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(From "South African Situation")

Prayer is nothing else but an intense longing of the heart. You may express yourself through the lips; you may express yourself in the private closet or in public; but to be genuine, the expression must come from the deepest recesses of the heart.

*Young India*, 16-12-'26, p. 440

(From "A Letter")

As grain is the body's food, so worship is the soul's. He who is convinced about the existence of the soul cannot live without worship. Prayer means the soul turning towards God.

*The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi—XLIX (1972), p. 222*

## 06. TRUE PRAYER

(From "Shrirampur Diary")

True prayer never goes unanswered. It does not mean that every little thing we ask for from God is readily given to us. It is only when we shed our selfishness with a conscious effort and approach God in true humility that our prayers find a response.

In the Ashram prayer nothing is asked. The prayer is for God to make us better men and women. If the prayer came truly from the heart, God's grace would surely descend upon us. There is not a blade of grass which moves without His will, not one single true thought which does not leave a mark on character. It is good, therefore, to develop the daily habit of prayer.

*Harijan, 5-1-'47, p. 479*

## 07. TRUE WORSHIP

We have forgotten God and we worship Satan. A man's duty is to worship God. Telling one's beads is no symbol of that worship; neither is going to mosque or temple, nor saying the *namaz*<sup>1</sup> or the *gayatri*? These things are all right as far as they go. It is necessary to do the one or the other according to one's religion. But by themselves they are no indication of one's being devoted to God in worship. He alone truly adores God who finds his happiness in the happiness of others, speaks evil of none, does not waste his time in the pursuit of riches, does nothing immoral, who acquits himself with others as with a friend, does not fear the plague or any human being.

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[From Gujarati: *Indian Opinion*, 15-7-1911]

*The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi—XI*, (1964), p. 126

"As is the God, so is the votary", is a maxim worth considering. Its meaning has been distorted and men have gone astray. ... I am not likely to obtain the result flowing from the worship of God by laying myself prostrate before Satan. If, therefore, anyone were to say: "I want to worship God; it does not matter that I do so by means of Satan", it would be set down as ignorant folly. We reap exactly as we sow.

*Hind Swaraj*, (1962), p. 71

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(From "For Christian Friends")

We are all children of the same God. "Verily verily I say unto you, not everyone that sayeth unto me Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of Heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven shall enter the Kingdom", was said, though in different words, by all the great teachers of the world.

*Harijan*, 18-4-'36, p. 77

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1. The Islamic Prayer
  2. The *Rigvedic* hymn to the Sun God

## 08. THE GREATEST BINDING FORCE

(From "The Discipline of Prayer" by Pyarelal)

Prayer is the greatest binding force, making for the solidarity and oneness of the human family. If a person realizes his unity with God through prayer, he will look upon everybody as himself. There will be no high, no low, no narrow provincialism or petty rivalries in the matter of language between an Andhra and a Tamilian, a Kanarese and a Malayalee. There will be no invidious distinction between a touchable and untouchable, a Hindu and a Musalman, a Parsi, a Christian or a Sikh. Similarly, there would be no scramble for personal gain or power between various groups or between different members within a group.

The outer must reflect the inner. If we are in tune with God, no matter how big a gathering, perfect quiet and order would prevail and even the weakest would enjoy perfect protection. Above all, realization of God must mean freedom from all earthly fear.

*Harijan*, 3-3-'46, p. 29

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(From a Letter)

How shall we know the (God's) will? By prayer and right living. Indeed prayer should mean right living. There is a *bhajan* we sing every day before the Ramayana commences whose refrain is "Prayer has been never known to have failed anybody. Prayer means being one with God."

*Bapu's Utters to Mira* [1924-1948], (1959), p. 286

## 09. PRAYER IS ALL INCLUSIVE

(From "Prayer Discourses" by Pyarelal)

God does not come down in person to relieve suffering. He works through human agency. Therefore, prayer to God, to enable one to relieve the suffering of others, must mean a longing and readiness on one's part to labour for it.

The prayer is not exclusive. It is not restricted to one's own caste or community. It is all inclusive. It comprehends the whole of humanity. Its realization would thus mean the establishment of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth.

*Harijan, 28-4-'46, p. 111*

## 10. A DIALOGUE WITH A BUDDHIST

(By M.D.)

### The Meaning of Prayer

Gandhiji had enough time to think and write during his recent visit to Abottabad, especially as he was kept free of many engagements and interviewers. But even there he had some interviewers—not of the usual type interested in politics or topics of the day but of the unusual type troubled with ultra-mundane problems. History has it that discourses on such problems used to take place in this region hallowed of old by the steps of the followers of Buddha. One of the interviewers of Gandhiji described himself as a follower of Buddha, and discussed a problem arising out of his creed. He is an archaeologist and loves to live in and dream of the past. Dr. Fabri—for that is his name—has been in India for many years. He was a pupil of Prof. Sylvan Levy and came out as assistant to the famous archaeologist Sir Aurel Stein. He served in the Archaeological Department for many years, helped in reorganizing the Lahore Museum, and has some archaeological work to his credit. Delving deep in Buddhistic lore has turned him into a stark rationalist. He is a Hungarian and had in the past corresponded with Gandhiji and even sympathetically fasted with him. He had come to Abottabad specially to see Gandhiji.

He was particularly exercised about the form and content of prayer and would very much like to know what kind of prayer Gandhiji said. Gould the Divine Mind be changed by prayer? Gould one find It out by prayer?

"It is a difficult thing to explain fully what I do when I pray," said Gandhiji, "But I must try to answer your question. The Divine Mind is unchangeable, but that Divinity is in everyone and everything—animate and inanimate. The meaning of prayer is that I want to evoke that Divinity within me. Now I may have that intellectual conviction, but not a living touch. And so when I pray for Swaraj or Independence for India I pray or wish for adequate power to gain that Swaraj or

to make the largest contribution I can towards winning it, and I maintain that I can get that power in answer to prayer."

"Then you are not justified in calling it prayer. To pray means to beg or demand," said Dr. Fabri.

"Yes, indeed. You may say I beg it of myself, of my Higher Self, the Real Self with which I have not yet achieved complete identification. You may, therefore, describe it as a continual longing to lose oneself in the Divinity which comprises all."

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### **Meditation or Imploration?**

"And you use an old form to evoke this?"

"I do. The habit of a life-time persists, and I would allow it to be said that I pray to an outside Power. I am part of that Infinite, and yet "such an infinitesimal part that I feel outside it. Though I give you the intellectual explanation, I feel, without identification with the Divinity, so small that I am nothing. Immediately I begin to say I do this thing and that thing I begin to feel my un- worthiness and nothingness, and feel that someone else, some higher Power has to help me."

"Tolstoy says the same thing. Prayer really is complete meditation and melting into the Higher Self, though one occasionally does lapse in .imploration like that of a child to his father."

"Pardon me," said Gandhiji, cautioning the Buddhist doctor, "I would not call it a lapse. It is more in the fitness of things to say that I pray to God who exists somewhere up in the clouds, and the more distant He is, the greater is my longing for Him and find myself in His presence in thought. And thought as you know has a greater velocity than light. Therefore, the distance between me and Him, though so incalculably great, is obliterated. He is so far and yet so near."

### **My Prayer not on a Different Level**

"It becomes a matter of belief, but some people like me are cursed with an acute critical faculty," said Dr. Fabri. "For me there is nothing higher than what Buddha taught, and no greater master. For Buddha alone among the teachers of the world said: 'Don't believe implicitly what I say. Don't accept any dogma or any book as infallible.' There is for me no infallible book in the world, inasmuch as all were made by men, however inspired they may have been. I cannot hence believe in a personal idea of God, a Maharaja sitting on the Great White Throne listening to our prayers. I am glad that your prayer is on a different level."

Let it be said in fairness to the Savant that he is a devotee of the Bhagavadgita and the Dhammapada, and those are the two scriptures he carries with him. But he was arguing an extreme intellectual position. Even here Gandhiji caught him from being swept into the torrent of his logic.

"Let me remind you," said Gandhiji, "that you are again only *partially* true when you say my prayer is on a different level. I told you that the intellectual conviction that I gave you is not eternally present with me. What is present is the intensity of faith whereby I lose myself in an Invisible Power. And so it is far truer to say that God has done a thing for me than that I did it. So many things have happened in my life for which I had intense longing, but which I could never have achieved myself. And I have always said to my co-workers it was in answer to my prayer. I did not say to them it was in answer to my intellectual effort to lose myself in the Divinity in me! The easiest and the correct thing for me was to say, 'God has seen me through my difficulty'."

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### **Karma Alone Powerless**

"But that you deserved by your Karma. God is Justice and not Mercy. You are a good man and good things happen to you," contended Dr. Fabri.

"No fear. I am not good enough for things to happen like that. If I went about with that philosophical conception of Karma, I should often come a cropper. My

Karma would not come to my help. Although I believe in the inexorable law of Karma I am striving to do so many things, every moment of my life is a strenuous endeavour, which is an attempt to build up more Karma, to undo the past and add to the present. It is therefore wrong to say that because my past is good, good is happening at present. The past would be soon exhausted, and I have to build up the future with prayer. I tell you Karma alone is powerless. 'Ignite this match,' I say to myself, and yet I cannot if there is no co-operation from without. Before I strike the match my hand is paralysed or I have only one match and the wind blows it off. Is it an accident or God or Higher Power? Well I prefer to use the language of my ancestors or of children. I am no better than a child. We may try to talk learnedly and of books, but when it comes to brass tracks—when we are face to face with a calamity—we behave like children and begin to cry and pray and our intellectual belief gives no satisfaction!"

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### **Did not Buddha Pray?**

"I know, very highly developed men to whom belief in God gives incredible comfort and help in the building up of character," said Dr. Fabri. "But there are some great spirits that can do without it. That is what Buddhism has taught me."

"But Buddhism is one long prayer," rejoined Gandhiji.

"Buddha asked everyone to find salvation from himself. He never prayed, he meditated," maintained Dr. Fabri.

"Gall it by whatever name you like, it is the same thing. Look at his statues."

"But they are not true to life," said the archaeologist questioning the antiquity of these statues. "They are 400 years later than his death," said he.

"Well," said Gandhiji, refusing to be beaten by a chronological argument, "give me your own history of Buddha as you may have discovered it. I will prove that he was a praying Buddha. The intellectual conception does not satisfy me. I have not given you a perfect and full definition as you cannot describe your

own thought. The very effort to describe is a limitation. It defies analysis and you have nothing but scepticism as the residue."

Was it of such people that Pope wrote ?—

"With too much knowledge for the sceptic side,  
With too much weakness for the stoic's pride,  
He hangs between; in doubt to act or rest;  
In doubt to deem himself a god or beast;  
In doubt his mind or body to prefer;  
Born but to die, and reasoning but to err;  
Sole judge of truth, in endless error hurled,  
The glory, jest and riddle of the world."

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### Be Humble

But to proceed, "What about the people who cannot pray?" asked Dr. Fabri.

"Be humble", said Gandhiji, "I would say to them, and do not limit even the real Buddha by your own conception of Buddha. He could not have ruled the lives of millions of men that he did and does today if he was not humble enough to pray. There is something infinitely higher than intellect that rules us and even the sceptics. Their scepticism and philosophy do not help them in critical periods of their lives. They need something better, something outside them that can sustain them. And so if someone puts a conundrum before me, I say to him, 'You are not going to know the meaning of God or prayer unless you reduce yourself to a cipher. You must be humble enough to see that in spite of your greatness and gigantic intellect you are but a speck in the universe. A merely intellectual conception of the things of life is not enough. It is the spiritual conception which eludes the intellect, and which alone can give one satisfaction. Even moneyed men have critical periods in their lives; though they are surrounded by everything that money can buy and affection can give, they find [themselves] at certain moments in their lives utterly distracted. It is in

these moments that we have a glimpse of God, a vision of Him who is guiding every one of our steps in life. It is prayer."

"You mean what we might call a true religious experience which is stronger than intellectual conception," said Dr. Fabri. "Twice in life I had that experience, but I have since lost it. But I now find great comfort in one or two sayings of Buddha: 'Selfishness is the cause of sorrow', 'Remember, monks, everything is fleeting'. To think of these takes almost the place of belief."

"That is prayer," repeated Gandhiji with an insistence that could not but have gone home.

*Harijan, 19-8-'39, p. 237*

## 11. WHY I LAY STRESS ON PRAYER

(From a prayer speech : May 30, 1945)

I lay stress on prayers because I believe in a Higher Power. Birth is not just an accident. Each man has to reap the fruits of his Karma. Life and death are in God's hands. It would be a good thing if we can think of God throughout the day; but as this is not possible, we should remember Him at least for a few minutes daily. If we do not express gratitude for many bounties of Providence daily, life ceases to have any meaning.

*Food for the Soul, (1957), p. 63*

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(From Press Report : April 3, 1945)

Every religion proclaims that man is not man if he praises not his Maker.

*Food for the Soul, (1957), p. 62*

## 12. PERSONAL TESTIMONY ON PRAYER

(The following talk on prayer by Gandhiji is reproduced from the letter by M.D. on his voyage to London which appeared under the title "From S. S. Rajputana—II".)

But perhaps even a greater centre of attraction. . . has been the prayer that we have every evening. The morning prayers are too early to attract these friends, but practically all Indians, (who number over 40).—Hindus, Musalmans, Parsis, Sikhs,—and a sprinkling of Europeans attend the evening prayers. At the request of some of these friends a fifteen minutes' talk after prayer and before dinner has become a daily feature, and I propose to share the first two talks with the readers of *Young India*. A question is asked each evening, and Gandhiji replies to it the next. One of the Indian passengers—a Musalman youth asked Gandhiji to give his personal testimony on prayer, not theoretic discourse but a narration of what he had felt and experienced as a result of prayer. Gandhiji liked the question immensely, and poured out his personal testimony from a full heart.

"Prayer," said he, "has been the saving of my life. Without it I should have been a lunatic long ago. My *Autobiography* will tell you, that I have had my fair share of the bitterest public and private experiences. They threw me into temporary despair, but if I was able to get rid of it, it was because of prayer. Now I may tell you, that prayer has not been part of my life in the sense that truth has been. It came out of sheer necessity, as I found myself in a plight when I could not possibly be happy without it. And the more my faith in God increased, the more irresistible became the yearning for prayer. Life seemed to be dull and vacant without it.

I had attended the Christian service in South Africa, but it had failed to grip me. I could not join them in prayer. They supplicated God, but I could not do so, I failed egregiously. I started with disbelief in God and prayer and until at a late stage in life I did not feel anything like a void in life. But at that stage I felt that as food was indispensable for the body, so was prayer indispensable for the soul. In fact food for the body is not so necessary as prayer for the soul.

For starvation is often necessary in order to keep the body in health, but there is no such thing as prayer-starvation. You cannot possibly have a surfeit of prayer.

Three of the greatest teachers of the world—Buddha, Jesus, Mohammed—have left unimpeachable testimony, that they found illumination through prayer and could not possibly live without it. But to come nearer home millions of Hindus and Musalmans and Christians find their only solace in life in prayer. Either you vote them down as liars or self-deluded people. Well, then, I will say that this lying has a charm for me, a truth-seeker, if it is 'lying' that has given me that mainstay or staff of life, without which I could not bear to live for a moment.

In spite of despair staring me in the face on the political horizon, I have never lost my peace. In fact I have found people who envy my peace. That peace, I tell you, comes from prayer. I am not a man of learning but I humbly claim to be a man of prayer. I am indifferent as to the form. Every one is a law unto himself in that respect. But there are some well-marked roads, and it is safe to walk along the beaten tracks, trod by the ancient teachers. Well, I have given my practical testimony. Let everyone try and find, that as a result of daily prayer he adds something new to his life, something with which nothing can be compared."

"But," said another youth the next evening, "Sir, whilst you start with belief in God, we start with unbelief. How are we to pray?"

"Well", said Gandhiji, "it is beyond my power to induce in you a belief in God. There are certain things which are self-proved, and certain which are not proved at all. The existence of God is like a geometrical axiom. It may be beyond our heart-grasp. I shall not talk of an intellectual grasp. Intellectual attempts are more or less failures, as a rational explanation cannot give you the faith in a living God. For it is a thing beyond the grasp of reason. It transcends reason. There are numerous phenomena from which you can reason out the existence of God, but I shall not insult your intelligence by offering you a rational explanation of that type. I would have you brush aside all rational explanations and begin with a simple childlike faith in God.

If I exist God exists. With me it is a necessity of my being as it is with millions. They may not be able to talk about it, but from their life you can see that it is part of their life. I am only asking you to restore the belief that has been undermined. In order to do so, you have to unlearn a lot of literature that dazzles your intelligence and throws you off your feet. Start with the faith which is also a token of humility and an admission that we know nothing, that we are less than atoms in this universe. We are less than atoms, I say, because the atom obeys the law of its being, whereas we in the insolence of our ignorance deny the law of nature. But I have no argument to address to those who have no faith.

"Once you accept the existence of God, the necessity for prayers is unescapable. Let us not make the astounding claim, that our whole life is a prayer, and therefore, we need not sit down at a particular hour to pray. Even men who were all their time in tune with the Infinite did not make such a claim. Their lives were a continuous prayer, and yet for our sake, let us say, they offered prayer at set hours, and renewed each day the oath of loyalty to God. God of course never insists on the oath, but we must renew our pledge every day, and I assure you we shall then be free from every imaginable misery in life."

*Young India*, 24-9-'31, p. 274

### 13. WHY PRAY?

(Originally appeared under the title : "Is God A Person or A Force?")

A friend from Baroda writes in English:

"You ask us to pray to God to give light to the whites in South Africa and strength and courage to the Indians there to remain steadfast to the end. A prayer of this nature can only be addressed to a person. If God is an all-pervading and all-powerful force, what is the point of praying to Him? He goes on with His work whatever happens."

I have written on this topic before. But as it is a question that crops up again and again in different languages, further elucidation is likely to help someone or the other. In my opinion, Rama, Rahaman, Ahurmazda, God or Krishna are all attempts on the part of man to name that invincible force which is the greatest of all forces.

It is inherent in man, imperfect he though be, ceaselessly to strive after perfection. In the attempt he falls into reverie. And, just as a child tries to stand, falls down again and again and ultimately learns how to walk, even so man, with all his intelligence is mere infant as compared to the infinite and ageless God. This may appear to be an exaggeration but is not. Man can only describe God in his own poor language. The power we call God defies description. Nor does that power stand in need of any human effort to describe Him. It is man who requires the means whereby he can describe that Power which is vaster than the ocean.

If this premise is accepted, there is no need to ask why we pray. Man can only conceive God within the limitations of his own mind. If God is vast and boundless as the ocean, how can a tiny drop like man imagine what He is? He can only experience what the ocean is like, if he falls into and is merged in it. This realization is beyond description. In Madame Blavatsky's language man, in praying, worships his own glorified self. He can truly pray, who has the conviction that God is within him. He who has not, need not pray. God will not

be offended, but I can say from experience that he who does not pray is certainly a loser.

What matters then whether one man worships God as a Person and another as Force? Both do right according to their lights. None knows and perhaps never will know what is absolutely proper way to pray. The ideal must always remain the ideal. One need only remember that God is the Force among all the forces. All other forces are material. But God is the vital force or spirit which is all-pervading, all-embracing and therefore beyond human ken.

*Harijan, 18-8-'46 p. 267*

## 14. THE OBJECT OF PRAYER

(From "Weekly Letter" by Pyarelal)

The object of prayer is not to please God, who does not want our prayers or praise, but to purify ourselves. The process of self-purification consists in a conscious realization of His presence within us. There is no strength greater than that which such realization gives. Presence of God has to be felt in every walk of life." If you think that as soon as you leave the prayer ground you can live and behave anyhow; your attendance of the prayer is useless.

*Harijan*, 26-5-'46, p. 156

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(From a prayer speech : Jan. 4, 1946)

Prayer ought to result in self-purification and it ought to transmute our entire conduct. If anybody thinks that it gives him licence to do as he likes during the rest of the day, he deceives himself and others. That is a travesty of the true meaning of prayer.

*Food for the Soul*, (1957), p. 80 fn.

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(From a prayer speech : Nov. 30, 1944)

Prayer does for the purification of the mind what the bucket and the broom do for the cleaning up of our physical surroundings. No matter whether the prayer we recite is the Hindu prayer or the Muslim or the Parsi, its function is essentially the same, namely, purification of the heart.

*Food for the Soul*, (1957), p. 80

## 15. SPONTANEOUS UPWELLING OF THE HEART

(From a prayer speech : April 12, 1945)

Whatever measure of success I have attained in the realization of truth and non-violence is the result of prayer.

Prayer should be a spontaneous upwelling of the heart. One should not pray if one feels that the prayer is a burden. God is not hungry for man's prayer or praise. He tolerates all because He is all Love. If we feel that we owe a debt to Him, who is the giver of all things, we should remember Him and pray to Him out of sheer gratitude. The fear of incurring anybody's ridicule or displeasure should never deter one from performing one's elementary duty towards the Maker.

*Food for the Soul*, (1957), p. 62

## 16. A MAN OF PRAYER KNOWS NO FEAR

(On his return from England after the failure of the Round Table Conference, Gandhiji was arrested in Bombay on 4th January 1932 in the quiet of night. Just the day before, i.e. on 3rd January, at the four o'clock morning prayer, he delivered a stirring little message to the people which appeared in the feature "The Historic Week—28th December 1931, – 4th January 1932" by M.D.)

You have been my companions in these prayers for some days, and now that the struggle is resumed again and I may be taken away any moment, I hope you will continue to have your prayers regularly morning and evening. Let it become a daily obligatory ritual for you. Prayer plays a large part in a self-purificatory sacrifice and you will see that it will be a veritable cow of plenty for you, and will make your way clear. The more you apply yourselves to it, the more fearlessness you will experience in daily life, for fearlessness is a sign and symbol of self-purification. I do not know a man or a woman who was on the path of self-purification and was still obsessed by fear. Generally there are two kinds of fears in men's minds –fear of death and fear of loss of material possessions. A man of prayer and self-purification will shed the fear of death and embrace death as a boon companion and will regard all earthly possessions as fleeting and of no account. He will see that he has no right to possess wealth when misery and pauperism stalk the land and when there are millions who have, to go without a meal. No power on earth can subdue a man who has shed these two fears. But for that purpose the prayer should be a thing of the heart and not a thing of outward demonstration. It must take us daily nearer to God, and a prayerful man is sure to have his heart's desire fulfilled, for the simple reason that he will never have an improper desire. Continue this ritual and you will shed lustre not only on your city but on our country. I hope this brief prayer of mine will find a lodgment in your heart.

*Young India, 7-1-'32, p. 8*

(From a letter)

I am very glad to know that you are not afraid. Why should one fear who knows that God is the Protector of all? By saying that God is the Protector of all I do not mean that none would be able to rob us or that no animal will attack us. It is no slur on God's protection if such things happen to us; it is only due to our lack of faith in Him. The river is for ever ready to give water to all. But if one does not go near it with a pot to get water, or avoids it thinking its water poisonous, how can that be the fault of the river? All fear is a sign of lack of faith. But faith cannot be developed by means of reasoning. It comes gradually through quiet thinking, contemplation and practice. To develop such faith, we pray to God, read good books, seek the company of the good and take to sacrificial spinning at the wheel. He who has no faith will not even touch the spinning-wheel.

*Bapu's Letters to Ashram Sisters, (1960), p. 28*

## 17. WHY RECITE HIS NAME?

(From "Non-violent Volunteer Corps")

There are many who, whether from mental laziness or from having fallen into a bad habit believe that God is and will help us unasked. Why then is it necessary to recite His name? It is true that if God is, He is irrespective of our belief. But realization of God is infinitely more than mere belief. That can come only by constant practice. This is true of all science. How much more true of the science of all sciences?

Man often repeats the name of God parrot-wise and expects fruit from so doing. The true seeker must have that living faith which will not only dispel the untruth of parrot-wise repetition from within him but also from the hearts of others.

*Harijan*, 5-5-'46, p. 113

## 18. BEAUTY OF REPETITION

(From "Weekly Letter" by M.D.)

"This repetition of one and the same thing over and over again jars on me. It may be the defect of my rationalist mathematical temperament. But somehow I cannot like the repetition. For instance, even Bach's wonderful music fails to appeal to me when the text 'Father, forgive them, they know not what they do,' is repeated over and over again."

"But even in mathematics, you have your recurring decimals," said Gandhiji smiling.

"But each recurs with a definite new fact," said the mathematician.

"Even so," said Gandhiji, "each repetition, or *japa* as it is called, has a new meaning, each repetition carries you nearer and nearer to God. This is a concrete fact, and I may tell you that you are here talking to no theorist, but to one who has experienced what he says every minute of his life, so much so that it is easier for the life to stop than for this incessant process to stop. It is definite need of the soul."

"I quite see it, but for the average man it becomes an empty formula."

"I agree, but the best thing is liable to be abused. There is room for any amount of hypocrisy, but even hypocrisy is an ode to virtue. And I know that for ten thousand hypocrites, you would find millions of simple souls who find their solace from it. It is like scaffolding quite essential to a building."

"But," said Pierre Ceresole, "if I may carry the simile a little further, you agree that the scaffolding has to be removed when the building is complete?"

"Yes, it would be removed when this body is removed."

"Why?"

"Because," said Wilkinson who was closely following the discourse, "we are eternally building."

"Because," said Gandhiji, we are eternally striving after perfection. God alone is perfect, man is never perfect."

*Harijan*, 25-5-'35, p. 115

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(From 'Letter to Premabehn Kantak')

This is how repetition of God's name wipes out one's sins. Anyone who sincerely follows that practice is bound to have faith. He starts with the conviction that such repetition will wipe out his sins. Wiping out of sins means self-purification. One who repeats God's name daily with faith will never grow tired of doing so, and therefore, the name which he repeats with his lips to start with sinks ultimately into his heart, and that purifies him. This is a universal experience. Psychologists also believe that man becomes what he thinks. Ramanama follows this law. I have unshakable faith in the virtue of repeating God's name. I am convinced that the person who discovered it had first-hand experience [of spiritual life] and that his discovery is of the utmost value. The door of purification should open even for the illiterate. Repetition of God's name opens it for them. (See *Gita* IX, 22, X. 10). Telling beads and similar practices help one to concentrate and to count the number of times the name has been repeated.

*The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi – L*, (1972), p. 326

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(From "A Letter")

You are right about the repetition of the prayers by some without knowing the meaning. Effort has been often made to remove the defect. But in a place which has a floating population, the task is difficult. A prayerful repetition is itself not a bad thing. It is like music that has no words. The music has its own distinct effect apart from words. This defence is good only where there is no hypocrisy and the mind is properly attuned.

*The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi –XLIX*, (1972), o. 42

## 19. NO FAITH IN PRAYER!

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Here is a letter written by a student to the Principal of a national institution, asking to be excused from attending its prayer meetings:

"I beg to state that I have no belief in prayer, as I do not believe in anything known as God to which I should pray. I never feel any necessity of supposing a God for myself. What do I lose if I do not care for Him, and calmly and sincerely work my own schemes?

"So far as congregational prayer is concerned, it is of no use. Can such a huge mass of men enter into any mental concentration upon a thing, however trifling it may be? Are the little and ignorant children expected to fix their fickle attention on the subtlest ideas of our great scriptures, God and soul and equality of all men and many other high-sounding phrases? This great performance is required to be done at a particular time at the command of a particular man. Can love for the so-called Lord take its root in the hearts of boys by any such mechanical function? Nothing can be more repugnant to reason than to expect the same behaviour from men of every temperament. Therefore, prayer should not be a compulsion. Let those pray who have a taste for it, and those avoid who dislike it. Anything done without conviction is an immoral and degrading action."

Let us first examine the worth of the last idea. Is it an immoral and degrading act to submit to discipline before one begins to have conviction about its necessity? Is it immoral and degrading to study subjects according to the school syllabus, if one has no conviction about its utility? May a boy be excused from studying his vernacular, if he has persuaded himself that it is useless? Is it not truer to say that a school boy has no conviction about the things he has to learn, or the discipline he has to go through? His choice is exhausted, if he had it, when he elected to belong to an institution. His joining one means that he

will willingly submit to its rules and regulations. It is open to him to leave it, but he may not choose what or how he will learn.

It is for teachers to make attractive and intelligible, what to the pupils may, at first, appear repulsive or uninteresting.

It is easy enough to say: "I do not believe in God." For, God permits all things to be said of Him with impunity. He looks at our acts. And any breach of His Law carries with it, not its vindictive, but its purifying, compelling, punishment. God's existence cannot be, does not need to be proved. God is. If He is not felt, so much the worse for us. The absence of feeling is a disease which we shall someday throw off *nolens volens*.

But a boy may not argue. He must, out of sense of discipline, attend prayer meetings, if the institution to which he belongs requires such attendance. He may respectfully put his doubts before his teachers. He need not believe what does not appeal to him. But if he has respect for his teachers, he will *do* without believing what he is asked to do, not out of fear, nor out of churlishness, but with the knowledge that it is right for him so to do, and with the hope that what is dark to him today will someday be made clear to him.

Prayer is not an asking. It is a longing of the soul. It is a daily admission of one's weakness. The tallest among us has a perpetual reminder of his nothingness before death, disease, old age, accidents etc. We are living in the midst of death. What is the value of 'working for our own schemes' when they might be reduced to naught in the twinkling of an eye, or when we may, equally swiftly and unawares, be taken away from them? But we may feel strong as a rock, if we could truthfully say: 'We work for God and His schemes.' Then, all is as clear as day-light. Then, nothing perishes. All perishing is, then, only what seems. Death and destruction have *then, but only then*, no reality about them. For, death and destruction is then but a change. An artist destroys his picture for creating a better one. A watchmaker throws away a bad spring to put in a new and a useful one.

A congregational prayer is a mighty thing. What we do not often do alone, we do together. Boys do not need conviction. If they merely attend in obedience to

the call to prayer, without inward resistance, they feel the exaltation. But many do not. They are even mischievous. All the same the unconscious effect cannot be resisted. Are there not boys who at the commencement of their career were scoffers, but who subsequently became mighty believers in the efficacy of congregational prayer? It is a common experience for men, who have no robust faith, to seek the comfort of congregational prayer. All who flock to churches, temples, or mosques are not scoffers or humbugs. They are honest men and women. For them congregational prayer is like a daily bath, a necessity of their existence. These places of worship are not a mere idle superstition to be swept away at the first opportunity. They have survived all attacks up to now, and are likely to persist to the end of time.

*Young India*, 23-9-'26, p. 333



(Originally appeared under the title "Tyranny of Words")

A correspondent thus writes on my article "No Faith in Prayer!":

"In your article bearing the above caption, you hardly do justice to the 'boy' or to your own position as a great thinker. It is true that the expressions used by the writer in his letter are not all happy, but of his clarity of thought there is no doubt. It is also *very* evident that he is not a boy as the word is understood. I should be much surprised to find him under twenty. Even if he is young, he seems to show sufficient intellectual development, not to be treated in the manner of 'a boy may not argue'. The writer of the letter is a rationalist while you are a believer, two age-old types with age-old conflict. The attitude of the one is, 'Let me be I convinced and I shall believe', that of the other is, 'Believe and conviction shall come'. The first appeals to reason, the second appeals to authority. You seem to think that agnosticism is but a passing phase among all young people, and that faith comes to them sooner or later. There is the well-known case of Swami Vivekananda to support your view. You, therefore, proceed to prescribe a compulsory dose of prayer to the 'boy' for his own good. Your reasons are twofold. Firstly, prayer for its own sake, as a recognition of one's own littleness, and mightiness and goodness of the supposed higher being. Secondly, for its utility, for the solace it brings to those who want to be

solaced. I shall dispose of the second argument first. Here, it is recommended as a sort of staff to the weak. Such are the trials of life, and such is their power to shatter reason of men that great many people may need prayer and faith some time. They have a right to it and they are welcome to it. But there have been, and there are always, some true rationalists – few, no doubt – who have never felt the necessity of either. There is also the class of people who, while they are not aggressive doubters, are indifferent to religion.

"As all people do not ultimately require the help of prayer, and as those who feel its necessity- are *free* to take to it, and *do* take to it when required, compulsion in prayer, from the point of utility cannot be upheld. Compulsory physical exercise and education may be necessary for physical and mental development of a person, not so the belief in God and prayer for the moral side. Some of the world's greatest agnostics have been the most moral men. To these, I suppose, you would recommend prayer for its own sake, as an expression of humility, in fact, your first argument. Too much has been made of this humility. So vast is knowledge that even the greatest scientists have felt humble sometimes, but their general trait has been that of *masterful* enquiry, their faith in their own powers has been as great as their conquest of nature. Had it not been so, we shall still be scratching earth with bare fingers for roots, nay, we should have been wiped out of the surface of the earth.

"During the Ice Age, when human beings were dying of cold and fire was first discovered, your prototype in that age must have taunted the discoverer with : "What is the use of your schemes, of what avail are they against the power and wrath of God?" The humble have been promised the Kingdom of God hereafter. We do not know whether they will get it, but here on this earth their portion is serfdom. To revert to the main point, your assertion about 'accept the belief and the faith shall come' is too true, terribly true. Much of religious fanaticism of this world can be traced directly to this kind of teaching. Provided you catch them young enough, you can make a good majority of human beings believe in *anything*. That is how your orthodox Hindu, or fanatical Mahomedan, is manufactured. There are, of course, always a small few in either community who will outgrow these beliefs that have been forced upon them Do you know that if the Hindus and the Mahomedans stopped studying their scriptures, until they reached maturity, they would not be such fanatical believers in their dogmas, and would cease to quarrel for their sake ? Secular education is the remedy for Hindu-Muslim riots, but you are not made that way.

"Great as our debt is to you for setting an unprecedented example in courage, action and sacrifice in this country where people have been always *much* afraid, when the final judgment is passed on your work, it will be said that your influence gave a great setback to intellectual progress in this country."

I do not know the meaning of boy 'as the word is ordinarily understood', if a 20 year old lad is not a boy. Indeed, I would call all school-going persons boys and girls, irrespective of their ages. But whether the doubting student may be called a boy or a man, my arguments must stand. A student is like a soldier (and a soldier may be 40 years old) who may not argue about matters of discipline, when he has put himself and chooses to remain under it. A soldier may not remain a unit in his regiment and have the option of doing or not doing things he is asked to do. Similarly, a student, no matter how wise or old he is, surrenders when he joins a school or a college the right of rejecting its discipline. Here, there is no underrating or despising the intelligence of the student. It is an aid to his intelligence for him to come voluntarily under discipline. But my correspondent willingly bears the heavy- yoke of the tyranny of words. He scents 'compulsion' in every act that displeases the doer. But there is compulsion and compulsion. We call self-imposed compulsion self- restraint. We hug it and grow under it. But compulsion to be shunned even at the cost of life, is restraint, superimposed upon us against our wills, and often with the object of humiliating us and robbing us of our dignity as men and boys, if you will. Social restraints generally are healthy, and we reject them to our own undoing. Submission to crawling orders is unmanly and cowardly. Worse still is the submission to the multitude of passions that crowd round us every moment of our lives, ready to hold us their slaves.

But the correspondent has yet another word that holds him in its chains. It is the mighty word 'rationalism'. Well, I had a full dose of it. Experience has humbled me enough to let me realize the specific limitations of reason. Just as matter misplaced becomes dirt, reason misused becomes lunacy. If we would but render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's, all would be well.

Rationalists are admirable beings. Rationalism is a hideous monster when it claims for itself omnipotence. Attribution of omnipotence to reason is as bad a piece of idolatry as is worship of stock and stone, believing it to be God.

Who has reasoned out the use of prayer? Its use is felt after practice. Such is the world's testimony. Cardinal Newman never surrendered his reason, but he yielded a better place to prayer when he humbly sang: 'One step enough for me'. Shankara was a prince among reasoners. There is hardly anything in the world's literature to surpass Shankara's rationalism. But he yielded the first place to prayer and faith.

The correspondent has made a hasty generalization from the fleeting and disturbing events that are happening before us. But everything on this earth lends itself to abuse. It seems to be a law governing everything pertaining to man. No doubt, religion has to answer for some of the most terrible crimes in history. But that is the fault not of religion, but of the ungovernable brute in man. He has not yet shed the effects of his brute ancestry.

I do not know a single rationalist who has never done anything in simple faith, and has based every one of his acts on reason. But we all know millions of human beings, living their more or less orderly lives because of their childlike faith in the Maker of us all. That very faith is a prayer. The 'boy', on whose letter I based my article, belongs to that vast mass of humanity, and the article was written to steady him and his fellow-searchers, not to disturb the happiness of rationalists like the correspondent.

But he quarrels even with the bent that is given to the youth of the world by their elders and teachers. But that, it seems, is an inseparable handicap (if it be one) of impressionable age. Purely secular education is also an attempt to mould the young mind after a fashion. The correspondent is good enough to grant that the body and the mind may be trained and directed. Of the soul, which makes the body and the mind possible, he has no care or perhaps he is in doubt as to its existence. But this belief cannot avail him. He cannot escape the consequence of his reasoning. For, why may not a believer argue, on the correspondent's own ground, and say he must influence the soul of boys and

girls, even as the others influence the body and the intelligence? The evils of religious instructions will vanish with the evolution of the true religious spirit. To give up religious instruction is like letting a field lie fallow, and grow weeds for want of the tiller's knowledge of the proper use of the field.

The correspondent's excursion into the great discoveries of the ancients is really irrelevant to the subject under discussion. No one questions, I do not, the utility or the brilliance of those discoveries. They were generally a proper field for the use and exercise of reason. But they, the ancients, did not delete from their lives the predominant function of faith and prayer. Works without faith and prayer, are like an artificial flower that has no fragrance. I plead, not for the suppression of reason, but for a due recognition of that in us which sanctifies reason itself.

*Young India*, 14-10-'26, p. 358

## 20. WHY NO FAITH IN PRAYER?

(From a letter)

And why no faith in prayer? Faith is either derived or revealed from within. You should derive it from the testimony without exception of all the teachers and the seers of all climes, countries and times. A true prayer is not a mere lip expression. It need never lie. Selfless service is prayer. You must not say, 'I have no faith in prayer.'

*Mahadevbhaini Diary, Vol. 2, (Gujarati Edn. 1949), p. 24*

## 21. HAVE FAITH

(From a discussion with a visitor)

Visitor: "If you pray to God, can He intervene and set aside the law for your sake?"

Gandhiji: "God's law remains unaltered but since that very law says that every action has a result, if a person prays, his prayer is bound to produce an unforeseeable result in terms of His law. . . "

"But do you know the God to whom you pray?"

"No, I don't."

"To whom shall we pray then?"

"To the God whom we do not know—we do not always know the person to whom we pray."

"May be, but the person to whom we pray is knowable."

"So is God; and since He is knowable, we search. It may take a billion years before we find Him. What does it matter? So, I say, even if you do not believe, you must continue to pray, i.e., search. 'Help thou my unbelief' is a verse from the Bible to be remembered. But it is not right to ask such questions. You must have infinite patience, and inward longing. Inward longing obviates all such questions. 'Have faith and you will be whole' is another tip from the Bible."

"When I look at nature around me," the venerable visitor finally said, "I say to myself, there must be one Creator, one God and to Him I should pray."

"That again is reasoning," Gandhiji replied. "God is beyond reason. But I have nothing to say if your reason is enough to sustain you."

*Mahatma Gandhi – The Last Phase Vol. I, Book One (1965), p. 59*

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(From "Letter to H. B. Tejumar")

To quote from scriptures will not help you. Draupadi's prayer is a celebrated instance. If one has faith in one's prayer, I have not a shadow of a doubt in my mind that it can move mountain. Faith and proof are contradictory acts. Hence illustrations are of little avail. The only thing is to pray whether one gets an answer to one's prayer or not. Prayer should never be directed to a selfish object.

*The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi – XXXII, (1969), p. 35*

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(From "Letter to C. R. Sangameswaran")

I can give you no help if you have no faith in God, and if you have faith in God you need no help from me. Therefore I would advise you to have faith in God and therefore also in prayer. You will then find that all the evil thoughts will leave you and that you will find peace of mind gradually growing on you, and you will become a fit instrument for service.

*The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi-XLVII, (1971), p. 326*

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(From "Letter to Premabehn Kantak")

I understand your view about the ceremonial recitation of the Gita. On this issue you may quarrel with Kaka-sahab to your heart's content. Personally, I think that at the back of your opposition to the proposal is your aversion to or lack of faith in the prayers themselves. If you had your way, I think you would have nothing besides the *dhun*. I would advise you to have faith in all the items of the prayers. If possible, concentrate your attention on the meaning of each item. If you cannot do that, have faith that the words you hear are noble and that even the fact of listening to them will do you good, and attend to them respectfully. Please do not understand from this that I wish to convert you to the proposal for completing the recitation in seven days. I have written this to convince you that there is some meaning in the prayers behind which lies fifteen years' *tapascharya*, with unswerving faith, on the part of some of us.

*The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi – XLIV, (1971),. p. 333*

## 22. THE HEALING BALM

(Form "Under the Starry Sky" by Pyarelal)

Q. What counsel do you give to the young men who are fighting a losing battle with their lower selves and come to you for advice?

A. Simply prayer. One must humble oneself utterly,, and look beyond oneself for strength.

Q. But what if the young men complain that their prayer is not heard, that they feel like speaking to brass heavens, as it were?

A. To want an answer to one's prayer is to tempt God. If prayer fails to bring relief it is only lip prayer. If prayer does not help, nothing else will. One must go on ceaselessly. This, then, is my message to the youth. In spite of themselves, the youth must believe in the all-conquering power of love and truth.

Q. The difficulty with our youth is that the study of science and modern philosophy has demolished their faith, and so they are burnt up by the fire of disbelief.

A. That is due to the fact that with them faith is an effort of the intellect, not an experience of the soul. Intellect takes us along in the battle of life to a certain limit, but at the crucial moment it fails us. Faith transcends reason. It is when the horizon is the darkest and human reason is beaten down to the ground, that faith shines brightest and comes to our rescue. It is such faith that our youth requires, and this comes when one has shed all pride of intellect and surrendered oneself entirely to His will.

*Young India, 21-3-1929, p. 96*

### 23. GOD'S WORD

(From "Notes")

My success lies in my continuous, humble, truthful striving. I *know* the path. It is straight and narrow. It is like the edge of a sword. I rejoice to walk on it. I weep when I slip. God's word is: "He who strives never perishes". I have implicit faith in that promise. Though therefore from my weakness I fail a thousand times, I will not lose faith but hope that I shall see the Light when the flesh has been brought under perfect subjection as some day it must.

*Young India*, 17-6-'26, p. 215

## 24. NIRBL KE BAL RAM ( निर्बल के बल राम )

Though I had acquired a nodding acquaintance with Hinduism and other religions of the world, I should have known that it would not be enough to save me in my trials. Of the thing that sustains him through trials man has no inkling, much less knowledge, at the time. If an unbeliever, he will attribute his safety to chance. If a believer, he will say God saved him. He will conclude, as well he may, that his religious study or spiritual discipline was at the back of the state of grace within him. But in the hour of his deliverance he does not know whether his spiritual discipline or something else saves him. Who that has prided himself on his spiritual strength has not seen it humbled to the dust? A knowledge of religion, as distinguished from experience, seems but chaff in such moments of trial.

It was in England that I first discovered the futility of mere religious knowledge. How I was saved on previous occasions is more than I can say, for I was very young then; but now I was twenty and had gained some experience as husband and father.

During the last year, as far as I can remember, of my stay in England, that is in 1890, there was a Vegetarian Conference at Portsmouth to which an Indian friend and I were invited. Portsmouth is a sea-port with a large naval population. It has many houses with women of ill fame, women not actually prostitutes, but at the same time, not very scrupulous about their morals. We were put up in one of these houses. Needless to say, the Reception Committee did not know anything about it. It would have been difficult in a town like Portsmouth to find out which were good lodgings and which were bad for occasional travelers like us.

We returned from the Conference in the evening. After dinner we sat down to play a rubber of bridge, in which our landlady joined, as is customary in England even in respectable households. Every player indulges in innocent jokes as a matter of course, but here my companion and our hostess began to make

indecent ones as well. I did not know that my friend was an adept in the art. It captured me and I also joined in. Just when I was about to go beyond the limit, leaving the cards and the game to themselves, God through the good companion uttered the blessed warning: 'Whence this devil in you, my boy? Be off, quick!'

I was ashamed. I took the warning and expressed within myself gratefulness to my friend. Remembering the vow I had taken before my mother, I fled from the scene. To my room I went quaking, trembling, and with beating heart, like a quarry escaped from its pursuer.

I recall this as the first occasion on which a woman, other than my wife, moved me to lust. I passed that night sleeplessly, all kinds of thoughts assailing me. Should I leave this house? Should I run away from the place? Where was I? What would happen to me if I had not my wits about me? I decided to act thenceforth with great caution; not to leave the house, but somehow leave Portsmouth. The Conference was not to go on for more than two days, and I remember I left Portsmouth the next evening, my companion staying there some time longer.

I did not then know the essence of religion or of God, and how He works in us. Only vaguely I understood that God had saved me on that occasion. On all occasions of trial He has saved me. I know that the phrase 'God saved me' has a deeper meaning for me today, and still I feel that I have not yet grasped its entire meaning. Only richer experience can help me to a fuller understanding. But in all my trials—of a spiritual nature, as a lawyer, in conducting institutions, and in politics—I can say that God saved me. When every hope is gone, 'when helpers fail and comforts flee,' I find that help arrives somehow, from I know not where. Supplication, worship, prayer are no superstition; they are acts more real than the acts of eating, drinking, sitting or walking. It is no exaggeration to say that they alone are real, all else is unreal.

Such worship or prayer is no flight of eloquency; it is no lip-homage. It springs from the heart. If, therefore, we achieve that purity of the heart when it is 'emptied of all but love', if we keep all the chords in proper tune, they 'trembling pass in music out of sight'. Prayer needs no speech. It is in itself

independent of any sensuous effort. I have not the slightest doubt that prayer is an unfailing means of cleansing the heart of passions. But it must be combined with the utmost humility.

*An Autobiography, (1969), pp. 52-54*

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\* '*Nirbal ke bala Rama*' – Refrain of Surdas' famous hymn, 'He is the help of the helpless, the strength of the weak.'

## 25. THE ONLY HELP OF THE HELPLESS

(From Gandhiji's address at a students' meeting in Rangoon which originally appeared under the title "To the Students".)

I know from correspondence with the students all over India what wrecks they have become by having stuffed their brains with information derived from a cartload of books. Some have become unhinged, others have become lunatics, some have been leading a life of helpless immaturity. My heart goes out to them when they say that try as much as they might, they are what they are, because they cannot overpower the devil. "Tell us," they plaintively ask, "how to get rid of the devil, how to get rid of the impurity that has seized us." When I ask them to take Ramanama and kneel before God and seek His help, they come to me and say, "We do not know where God is. We do not know what it is to pray." That is the state to which they have been reduced. I have, therefore, been asking the students to be on their guard. . . . Never own a defeat in a sacred cause and make up your minds henceforth that you *will* be pure and that you *will* find a response from God. But God never answers the prayers of the arrogant, nor the prayers of those who bargain with Him. Have you heard the story of *Gajendra Moksha*? I ask the Burmese students here who do not know one of the greatest of all poems, one of the divinest things of the world, to learn it from their Indian friends. A Tamil saying has always remained in my memory and it means, God is the help of the helpless. If you would ask Him to help you, you would go to Him in all your nakedness, approach Him without reservations, also without fear or doubts as to how He can help a fallen being like you. He who has helped millions, who have approached Him, is He going to desert you? He makes no exceptions whatsoever and you will find that everyone of your prayers will be answered. The prayer of even the most impure will be answered. I am telling this out of my personal experience, I have gone through the purgatory. Seek first the Kingdom of Heaven and everything will be added unto you.

*Young India*, 4-4-'29, p. 110

## 26. GOD'S COVENANT

(Gist of the speech at a prayer meeting in Congress House, Bombay, from "Weekly Letter" by M.D.)

You will wonder why I consented to have a prayer meeting in Bombay, when even the existence of God is with many a matter of doubt. There are others who say: 'If God is seated in the heart of everyone, who shall pray to whom, who shall invoke whom?' I am not here to solve these intellectual puzzles. I can only say that ever since my childhood prayer has been my solace and my strength.

. . . There are those who are struck with doubt and despair. For them there is the name of God. It is God's covenant that whoever goes to Him in weakness and helplessness, him He will make strong. 'When I am weak, then I am strong.' As the Poet Surdas has sung, Rama is the strength of the weak. This strength is not to be obtained by taking up arms or by similar means. It is to be had by throwing oneself on His name. Rama is but a synonym of God. You may say God or Allah or whatever other name you like, but the moment you trust naught but Him, you are strong, all disappointment disappears.

The hymn alludes to the story of the Lord of elephants who was in the jaws of a crocodile and who had been all but drowned in water. There was only the tip of his trunk left above water when he invoked God's name and he was saved. No doubt it is an allegory. But it conceals a truth. Over and over again in my life have I found it. Even in darkest despair, when there seems no helper and no comfort in the wide world His name inspires us with strength and puts all doubts and despair to flight. The sky may be overcast today with clouds, but a fervent prayer to Him is enough to dispel them. It is because of prayer that I have known no disappointment. . . . Let us pray that He may cleanse our hearts of pettinesses, meannesses and deceit, and He will surely answer our prayers.

*Harijan*, 1-6-'35, p. 123

## 27. SECRET OF SELF-CONTROL

(From "Brahmo Samaj's Contribution to Hinduism")

I am inundated with letters from young men who write frankly about their evil habits and about the void that their unbelief has made in their lives. No mere medical advice can bring them relief. I can only tell them that there is no way but that of surrender to and trust in God and His grace. Let us all utilize this occasion by giving the living religion in our lives the place it deserves. Has not Akhobhagat said,

Live as you will, but so  
As to realize God.

*Young India*, 30-8-'28, p. 291

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(From a letter written from jail by Gandhiji to Sheth Jamnalal Bajaj which appeared in an article titled "Jamnalalji" by M.D.)

*Moksha* is liberation from impure thought. Complete extinction of impure thought is impossible without ceaseless penance. There is only one way to achieve this. The moment an impure thought arises, confront it with a pure one. This is possible only with God's grace, and God's grace comes through ceaseless communion with Him and complete self-surrender. This communion may in the beginning be just a lip repetition of His name even disturbed by impure thoughts. But ultimately what is on the lips will possess the heart. And there is another thing to bear in mind. The mind may wander, but let not the senses wander with it. If the senses wander where the mind takes them, one is done for. But he who keeps control of the physical senses will someday be able to bring impure thoughts under control. . . . Impure thoughts need not dismay you. We are monarchs of the domain of Effort. God is sole Monarch of the domain of Result. . . . You know what to do to create a pure atmosphere about you. Spare diet, sight fixed on the earth below, and impatience with oneself to the extent of plucking the eye out if 'it offends thee'.

*Harijan*,, 22-2-'42, p. 47

For me the observance of even bodily *brahmacharya* has been full of difficulties. Today I may say that I feel myself fairly safe, but I have yet to achieve complete mastery over thought, which is so essential. Not that the will or effort is lacking, but it is yet a problem to me where- from undesirable thoughts spring their insidious invasions. I have no doubt that there is a key to lock out undesirable thoughts, but everyone has to find it out for himself. Saints and seers have left their experiences for us, but they have given us no infallible and universal prescription. For perfection or freedom from error comes only from grace, and so seekers after God have left us *mantras*, such as Ramanama, hallowed by their own austerities and charged with their purity. Without an unreserved surrender to His grace, complete mastery over thought is impossible. This is the teaching of every great book of religion, and I am realizing the truth of it every moment of my striving after that perfect *brahmacharya*.

*An Autobiography*, (1969), p. 238

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(From "A Letter")

Prayer and *brahmacharya* are not things of the same kind. *Brahmacharya* is one of the five cardinal vows, and prayer is a means of being able to observe them. I have said a great deal to explain the necessity of *brahmacharya*. But when I tried to think, how one can observe it, I discovered a powerful means in prayer. For him who has realized the value of prayer and is able to pray with concentration, *brahmacharya* becomes quite easy to observe.

*The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi—L*, (1972), pp. 377-78

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(From *Brahmacharya* or Self-control")

There is however a golden rule for gaining control of the carnal desire. It is the repetition of the divine word 'Rama' or such other *mantra*. The *Duadash Mantra*<sup>1</sup> also serves the same purpose. Everyone must select the *mantra* after his heart.

I have suggested the word 'Rama' because I was brought up to repeat it in my childhood and I have ever got strength and sustenance out of it. Whichever *mantra* is selected, one should be identified with it whilst repeating it. I have not the least doubt of ultimate success as a result of repetition of some such *mantra* in complete faith, even though other thoughts distract the mind. The *mantra* will be the light of one's life and will keep one from all distress. Such holy *mantras* should obviously never be used for material ends. If their use is strictly restricted to the preservation of morals, the results attained will be startling. Of course a mere repetition of such a *mantra* parrot wise would be of no avail. One should throw his whole soul into it. The parrot repeats it like a machine. We should repeat it with a view to preventing the approach of unwelcome thoughts and with full faith in the efficacy of the *mantra* to that end.

*Young India*, 5-6-'24, p. 187

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It (real self-control) does not come by reading. It comes only by definite realization that God is with us and looks after us as if He had no other care besides. How this happens I do not know. That it does happen I do know. Those who have faith have all their cares lifted off their shoulders. You cannot have faith and tension at the same time.

*Bapus Letters to Mir a [1924-1948]*, (1959), p. 255

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(From "*Brahmacharya for Satyagraha*")

This control is unattainable save the grace of God. There is a verse in the second chapter of the Gita which freely rendered means: "sense-objects remain in abeyance whilst one is fasting or whilst the particular sense is starved, but the hankering does not cease except when one sees God face to face.

*Harijan*, 23-7-'38, p. 192

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ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय | – A sacred incantation of these 12 letters

## 28. A CALL TO REPENTANCE

(From "The Sacred Week" by Pyarelal)

To err is human. By confessing, we convert our mistakes into stepping stones for advance. On the contrary, a person who tries to hide his mistakes becomes a living fraud and sinks down. Man is neither brute nor God, but a creature of God striving to realize his divinity. Repentance and self-purification are the means. The moment we repent and ask God for forgiveness for our lapse, we are purged of our sin and new life begins for us. True repentance is an essential pre-requisite of prayer.

Prayer is not mere lip service. It must express itself through action.

*Harijan, 21-4-'46, p. 94*

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God does not fail to forgive even those who atone for their sins during the last moments of their life. We must have at heart the welfare of all living beings that exist on the earth, however small or large. To foster this spirit we must daily offer our prayers to the Almighty both in the morning and in the evening. The wishes for the well-being of all also embrace our own welfare.

*My Memorable Moments with Bapu, (1960), Ch. 25, p. 46*

## 29. VISITATIONS

(Original: "Let Us Pray")

When a man is down, he prays to God to lift him up. He is the Help of the helpless, says a Tamil proverb. The appalling disaster in Quetta paralyses one. It baffles all attempt at reconstruction. The whole truth about the disaster will perhaps never be known. The dead cannot be recalled to life.

Human effort must be there always. Those who are left behind must have help. Such reconstruction as is possible will no doubt be undertaken. All this and much more along the same line can never be a substitute for prayer.

But why pray at all? Does not God, if there be one, know what has happened? Does He stand in need of prayer to enable Him to do His duty?

No, God needs no reminder. He is within everyone. Nothing happens without His permission. Our prayer is a heart search. It is a reminder to ourselves that we are helpless without His support. No effort is complete without prayer,—without a definite recognition that the best human endeavour is of no effect if it has not God's blessing behind it. Prayer is a call to humility. It is a call to self-purification, to inward search.

I must repeat what I said at the time of the Bihar disaster. There is a divine purpose behind every physical calamity. That perfected science will one day be able to tell us beforehand when earthquakes will occur, as it tells us today of eclipses, is quite possible. It will be another triumph of the human mind. But such triumphs even indefinitely multiplied can bring about no purification of self without which nothing is of any value.

Of course we will forget this latest calamity as we have forgotten the Bihar one. I ask those who appreciate the necessity of inward purification to join in the prayer that we may read the purpose of God behind such visitations, that they may humble us and prepare us to face our Maker whenever the call comes, and that we may be ever ready to share the sufferings of our fellows whoever they may be.

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(Originally appeared under the title "Implications of Prayer")

The few lines that I wrote inviting the people to- prayer and repentance on the Quetta disaster have given rise to some private correspondence. One of the correspondents asks: "At the time of the Bihar 'quake you had no hesitation in saying that it was to be taken by Savarna Hindus as a fit punishment for the sin of untouchability. For what sin must the more terrible "'quake of Quetta be?" The writer had > the right to put the question. What I said about Bihar<sup>1</sup> was deliberately said even as the lines on Quetta were deliberately written.

This call to prayer is a definite yearning of the soul. Prayer is a sign of repentance, a desire to become better, purer. A man of prayer regards what are known as physical calamities as divine chastisement. It is a chastisement alike for individuals and for nations. All chastisements do not equally startle people. Some affect only individuals, some others affect groups or nations only mildly. Disasters like Quetta stun us. Familiarity with ordinary everyday calamities breeds contempt for them. If earthquakes were a daily occurrence, we would take no notice of them. Even this Quetta one has not caused in us the same disturbance that the Bihar one did.

But it is the universal experience that every calamity brings a sensible man down on his knees. He 'thinks that it is God's answer to his sins and that he must henceforth behave better. His sins have left him hopelessly weak, and in his weakness he cries out to God for help. Thus have millions of human beings used their personal calamities for self-improvement. Nations have been known to invoke the assistance of God when calamities have overtaken them. They have abased themselves before God and appointed days of humiliation, prayer and purification.

I have suggested nothing new or original. In these days of fashionable disbelief, it does need some courage to call men and women to repentance. But I can claim no credit for courage. For my weaknesses or idiosyncrasies are well known. If I had known Quetta, as I know Bihar and Biharis, I would certainly

have mentioned the sins of Quetta, though they might be no more its specialities than untouchability was Bihar's. But we all—the rulers and the ruled—know that we have many sins personal and national to answer for. The call is to all these to repentance, prayer and humiliation. True prayer is not a prelude to inaction. It is a spur to ceaseless, selfless action. Purification is never for the selfishly idle, it accrues only to the selflessly industrious.

*Harijan*, 15-6-'35, p. 140

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(From "Weekly Letter—No. 12" by C. S.)

Our forefathers and cur mothers have taught us to think that, when a calamity descends upon us, it comes because of our personal sin. You know that when rain does not come in time, we perform sacrifices and ask God to forgive us our sins. It is not only here, but I have seen it in England and South Africa that, when locusts descend upon fields or any such thing happens, they appoint days of humiliation, prayer and fasting and pray for the passing of the visitation.

*Harijan*, 2-2-'34, p. 5

### 30. DIVINE GUIDANCE

(From "Dr. Mott's<sup>1</sup> Second Visit" by M. D.)

*Dr. Mott:* What has brought deepest satisfaction to your soul in difficulties and doubts and questionings?

*Gandhiji:* Living faith in God.

*Dr. Mott:* When have you had indubitable manifestation of God in your life and experiences?

*Gandhiji:* I have seen and believe that God never appears to you in person, but in action which can only account for your deliverance in your darkest hour.

*Dr. Mott:* You mean things take place that cannot possibly happen apart from God.

*Gandhiji:* Yes. They happen suddenly and unawares. One experience stands quite distinctly in my memory. It relates to my 21 days' fast for the removal of untouchability. I had gone to sleep the night before without the slightest idea of having to declare a fast the next morning. At about 12 o'clock in the night something wakes me up suddenly, and some voice,—within or without, I cannot say—whispers 'Thou must go on a fast.' 'How many days?' I ask. The voice again said, 'Twenty-one days.' 'When does it begin?' I ask. It says, 'You begin tomorrow.' I went quietly off to sleep after making the decision. I did not tell anything to my companions until after the morning prayer. I placed into their hands a slip of paper announcing my decision and asking them not to argue with me, as the decision was irrevocable.

Well, the doctors thought, I would not survive the fast but something within me said I would, and that I must go forward. That kind of experience has never in my life happened before or after that date.

*Dr. Mott:* Now, you surely can't trace such a thing to an evil source?

*Gandhiji:* Surely not. I never have thought it was an error. If ever there was in my life a spiritual fast it was this. There is something in denying satisfaction of

the flesh. It is not possible to see God face to face unless you crucify the flesh. It is one thing to do what belongs to it as a temple of God, and it is another to deny it what belongs to it as to the body of flesh.

*Harijan*, 10-12-'39, p. 373

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(To a Student)

In the phrase 'seeing God face to face', 'face to face' is not to be taken literally. It is a matter of decided feeling. God is formless. He can therefore, only, be seen by spiritual sight-vision.

*Mahadevbhaini Diary*, Vol. I (Gujarati Edn., 1948), p. 52

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1 Founder of the Y.M.C.A. movement

### 31. GUIDANCE

(From "A Word to the Oxford Groupers" by M. D.)

I wrote some weeks ago, in these columns, a note on the Oxford Group and their methods of work. They seem to have attracted some attention, especially because there was held soon after in Srinagar a conference "retreat" of some of the members of the group. As soon as the War broke out a wire was received by Gandhiji asking for an interview with him by several members headed by the very Rev. the Metropolitan Bishop of Calcutta. "It is no use dragging the Metropolitan to Wardha," said Gandhiji in reply, "but youths may come, for them I have no mercy."

In response to this, six friends came to Wardha on the 23rd of last month. These included a barrister and his wife, an American journalist, a European who is a railway official, and a gifted lady, daughter of a one-time Army Officer, who has come on a tour to India and "stayed on to make reparation for her nation which has got from India and not given", as another member described her.

Their mission may be described in common parlance one of thinking aloud, and in their language of "spiritual sharing". "There is good somewhere in all," said one of the members, "and there are different ways of finding that out. For us it is by sharing. Every morning I sit down to find out what God wants and then whether I am ready to be obedient to His will. If I can be absolutely obedient, then He will work through me." Another member said: "You have always been listening to God. We feel that the solution of those problems for which you have worked would be reached if all the millions of India would start listening to God. We feel we have a place in this plan and have therefore come to you in joy."

Some of the members described their experiences of changes having come over the lives of men and women by thus "listening in".

How one wishes the problem was so simple as these good men and women believed it to be. The modern age has brought its new technical terms—scientific and psychological. Where people of old used to use the word "prayer", "listening in" is the modern word. It is all right for those who are not in want to say comfortably we will listen in", but it would take a certain amount of brazen-facedness to tell the man for whom getting a square meal a day is the eternal problem, "Listen in and you shall get your bread." Modern age has accentuated the gulf between the "haves" and the "have-nots", between the exploiters and the exploited. With what face shall the former say to the latter, "You better listen in to God and your miseries will be at an end?"

There was a discussion and Gandhiji spoke out his mind to them. "How I wish I had the same enthusiasm that fires you," he said. "Of course I have the experience of listening, not merely of trying to listen. The more I listen, the more I discover that I am still far away from God. While I can lay down rules, the observance of which is essential for proper listening, the reality still escapes me. When we say we are listening to God and getting answers, though we say it truthfully, there is every possibility of self-deception. I do not know that I am myself altogether free from self-deception. People sometimes ask me if I may not be mistaken, and I say to them, 'Yes, very likely, what I say may be just a picture of my elongated self before you.'

"And then see how one may claim to be God-guided in taking a particular course of action, and another may make the same claim in taking an opposite course of action. I will give you a good illustration. Rajaji, whom you know, at any rate whose name you have heard, is I think unsurpassed in godliness or God-mindedness. Now when I took the 21 days' purificatory fast in the Yeravda Jail in 1933 and proclaimed that it was in answer to a call from God, Rajagopalachari came all the way from Madras to dissuade me. He felt sure that I was deluding myself and that I should probably die and, if I did not, I should certainly be demented. Well, you see that I am still alive and of a sound mind. And yet perhaps Rajaji still thinks I was deluded and it was by an

accident that I was saved, and I continue to think that I fasted in answer to the still small voice within.

"I say this in order to warn you how unwise it may be to believe that you are always listening to God. I am not at all against the endeavour, but I warn you against thinking that this is a kind of 'open sesame' which has just to be shown to the millions. No one will contradict me when I say I have tried my very best to make India listen to the way of God. I have had some success but I am still far away from the goal. When I listen to the testimonies you have given I become cautious and even suspicious. In South Africa a preacher came who after his sermon got people to sign their names under a pledge, which was published in a book, binding them not to drink. Well, I have been witness to numerous of these promises being broken. It was no fault of these people. They signed the pledge under the temporary influence of the preacher's moving eloquence.

"This I know that all that glitters is not gold, and also that if a man has really heard the Voice of God, there is no sliding back, just as there is no forgetting it by one who has learnt to swim. The listening in must make people's lives daily richer and richer.

"Let me not appear to damp your enthusiasm; but if it is to be built on solid rock, it is better that listening in is also based on solid rock.

"This listening in presupposes the fitness to listen, and the fitness is acquired after constant and patient striving and waiting on God. Shankaracharya has likened the process to the attempt to empty the sea by means of a drainer small as the point of a blade of grass. This process thus necessarily is endless being carried through birth after birth.

"And yet the effort has to be as natural as breathing or the winking of the eyes, which processes happen without our knowing them. The effort coincides with the process of living. I commend to you this process of eternal striving which alone can take us face to face with God."

The next day they returned having slept over this message. It was, they said, a challenge to more "life changing", or again to put it in common parlance, more self-purification. But man often becomes a prisoner of his own making, and so these good friends produced another word begging the same rigorous definition and spiritual striving as "listening in", viz. repentance. "Repentance is the foundation of peace. Repentance is the wave-length that will reach every heart and every nation." The friend who is also a poet left for Gandhiji a poetic message in which she said:

"God! May there flow forth through all the earth  
Repentance in the torrent of its power,  
Washing perception clean and motive pure,  
Breaking through every faction, every heart  
Without exception, for all have sinned."

Quite true, we all have sinned in a greater or a less degree. But whereas the poor "have-nots" have, if I may say so, sinned against God, the "haves" or the exploiters have sinned both against God and man. And so Gandhiji asked, "What is India as a nation to do at this juncture? What would you want her to do? How is she to repent?"

India may say she has committed many sins for which she is suffering and would pray to be given the strength to wipe them out. Or is there anything else at the back of your minds?" There was no satisfactory reply. "We should begin listening to God as a whole," was their reply so far as I recollect it. That is how we escape the conclusion of our own premises. Bluntly speaking the exploited have to pray, the exploiters have to repent—both prayers and repentance not being abstract mental attitudes but expressing themselves in action. The Harijan may pray for sins which may have made him an untouchable, but the Savarna Hindu who has kept him an untouchable has to repent by starting with befriending him and striving to put him on a level equal to his own, in brief, by a steady process of self-purification and self-sacrifice. And after all the names "haves" and "have-nots" are but other names for "non-Harijans" and "Harijans", or "exploiters" and "exploited" or "debtors" and "creditors". It does not lie in the

mouth of a debtor to say he will not pay until the creditor prays or purifies himself. His duty of repentance and repayment comes first and foremost and he may not even think of the duty of the creditor.

*Harijan, 7-10-'39, p. 299*

## 32. VISIONS

(From "Frontier Notes—III" by Pyarelal)

A professor of Islamia College at Peshawar who came to see Gandhiji during his tour of the Frontier Province asked latter the question whether he had anything like a prophetic vision. Gandhiji answered him as follows:

"I do not know what you call a vision and what you will call prophetic. But let me give you an experience in my life. When I announced my fast of 21 days in jail I had not reasoned about it. On retiring to bed the previous night I had no notion that I was going to announce the next morning a fast of 21 days. But in the middle of the night a voice woke me up and said: 'Go through a fast.' 'How many?' I asked. '21 days', was the answer. Now let me tell you that my mind was unprepared for it, disinclined for it. But the thing came to me as clearly as anything could be. Let me tell you one thing more and I have done. Whatever striking things I have done in life I have not done prompted by reason but prompted by instinct, I would say God. Take the Dandi Salt March of 1930. I had not the ghost of a suspicion how the breach of the salt law would work itself out. Pandit Motilalji and other friends were fretting and did not know what I would do; and I could tell them nothing, as I myself knew nothing about it. But like a flash it came, and as you know it was enough to shake the country from one end to the other. One last thing. Until the last day I knew nothing about announcing the 6th of April 1919 as a day of fasting and prayer. But I dreamt about it—there was no Voice or Vision as in 1930 —and I felt it was just the thing to do. In the morning I shared it with G. R. and announced it to the country, you know with what a wonderfully spontaneous response."

*Harijan*, 14-5-'38, p. 109

### 33. "INNER VOICE"

(From "Letter to Premabehn Kantak")

The "inner voice" is something which cannot be described in words. But sometimes we have a positive feeling that something in us prompts us to do a certain thing. The time when I learnt to recognise this voice was, I may say, the time when I started praying regularly. That is, it was about 1906. I searched my memory and tell you this because you asked the question. In fact, however, there was no moment when I suddenly felt that I had some new experience. I think my spiritual life has grown without my being conscious of the fact in the same way as hair grows on our body.

*The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*— L, (1972), p. 326

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From a speech at the A.I.C.G. Session in August 1942)

There is something within me impelling me to cry out my agony. I have known exactly what to do. That something which never deceives me tells me now: "You have to stand against the whole world although you may have to stand alone. You have to stare the world in the face although the world may look at you with bloodshot eyes. Do not fear. Trust that little thing in you which resides in the heart and says: 'Forsake friends, wife, all; but testify to that for which you have lived and for which you have to die.'

*[United Asia, February, 1955]*

*Homage to the Departed* (1958), p. 202

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(From "Five Conundrums" in "Notes")

Q.: Does the "Inner Voice" mean the "message of God"?

A.: The "Inner Voice" may mean a message from God or the Devil, for both are wrestling in the human breast. Acts determine the nature of the voice.

*Young India*, 13-2-'30, p. 56

(From "Question Box")

(Q.: How can an ordinary man distinguish between God's will and his own will?)

A.: By not regarding anything as God's will unless he has positive proof to the contrary. Not every person can know God's will. Proper training is necessary to attain the power to know God's will.

*Harijan, 27-4-'40, p. 101*

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(From "All About the Fast")

No act of mine is done without prayer. Man is a fallible being. He can never be sure of his steps. What he may regard an answer to prayer, may be an echo of his pride. For infallible guidance, man has to have a perfectly innocent heart incapable of evil. I can lay no such claim. Mine is a struggling, striving, erring, imperfect soul. But I can rise only by experimenting upon myself and others.

*Young India, 25-9-'24, p. 313*

## II. FORMS AND METHODS OF PRAYER

*Prayer brings a peace, a strength and a consolation that nothing else can give. But it must be offered from the heart. When it is not offered from the heart, it is like the beating of a drum, or just the vocal effect of the throat sounds. When it is offered from the heart, it has the power to melt mountains of misery. Those who want are welcome to try its power.*

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*I would urge the modern generation not to regard fasting and prayer with scepticism or distrust. The greatest teachers of the world have derived extraordinary powers for the good of humanity and attained clarity of vision through fasting and prayer. Much of this discipline runs to waste because instead of being matter of the heart, it is often resorted to for stage effect.*

### 34. YAJNA

Now to offer prayers is easy enough. But they are not heard unless they are offered from a pure and contrite heart. Let me tell you that *yajna* has a deeper meaning than the offering of ghee and other things in the sacrificial fire. *Yajna* is sacrifice of one's all for the good of humanity, and to me these offerings of *ahutis* have a symbolic meaning. We have to offer up our weaknesses, our passions, our narrowness into the purifying fire, so that we may be cleansed. Then and then only our prayers would be heard.

Let me also place before you another aspect of prayer. You have assembled here for the fulfillment of your desires, and the *yajna* is performed to that purpose. Now desires may be good and bad, and not every one of us knows which of his desires is good and pure and which not. It is He who presides over our thoughts and acts who knows this, and so I always pray that God may grant only such of my desires as may be good and pure, and reject all my prayers if they partake of impurity or grossness. I invite you to join me in that kind of prayer today.

One last thing. The prayer for peace is accepted on all hands as a pure prayer, and in these times of severe strife and cruel bloodshed it is well that we offer prayers for peace. There is a great Vedic prayer which I should like to recite in this connection, and I am sure you will all join me when I do so:

यदिह घोरं यदिह क्रूरं यदिह पापं ।

तच्छान्त तच्छिवं सर्वमेव शमस्तु न : ॥

(Whatever there is heinous, and cruel and sinful, may all that be stilled; may everything be good and peaceful for us.)

*Harijan*, 3-5-'42, p. 139

### 35. HOW I ESTABLISH COMMUNION WITH GOD

(From the summary by M. D. of Gandhiji's concluding discourse at the Gandhi Seva Sangh meeting which appeared under the title "The Concluding Discourse")

I do not know whether I am a Karmayogi or any other Yogi. I know that I cannot live without work. I crave to die with my hand at the spinning wheel. If one has to establish communion with God through some means, why not through the spinning wheel? "Him who worships Me," says the Lord in the Gita, "I guide along the right path and see to his needs." My God is myriad-formed, and while sometimes I see Him in the spinning wheel, at other times I see Him in communal unity, then again in removal of untouchability; and that is how I establish communion with Him according as the Spirit moves me.

*Harijan, 8-5-'37, p. 99*

### 36. THE FORM OF MY PRAYER

(From "Non-violence and World Crisis" by Pyarelal)

A missionary who called on Gandhiji at his retreat in Segaon asked him, "What is your method of worship?"

In reply, Gandhiji said: "We have joint worship morning and evening at 4-20 a. m. and 7 p. m. This has gone on for years. We have a recitation of verses from the Gita and other accepted religious books, also hymns of saints with or without music. Individual worship cannot be described in words. It goes on continuously and even unconsciously. There is not a moment when I do not feel the presence of a witness whose eye misses nothing and with whom I strive to keep in tune. I do not pray as Christian friends do. Not because I think there is anything wrong in it, but because words won't come to me. I suppose it is a matter of habit."

*Missionary:* Is there any place for supplication in your prayer?

*Gandhiji:* There is and there is not. God knows and anticipates our wants. The Deity does not need my supplication, but I, a very imperfect human being, do need His protection as a child that of its father. And yet I know that nothing I do is going to change His plans. You may call me a fatalist, if you like.

*Missionary:* Do you find any response to your prayer?

*Gandhiji:* I consider myself a happy man in that respect. I have never found Him lacking in response. I have found Him nearest at hand when the horizon seemed darkest – in my ordeals in jails when it was not all smooth sailing for me. I cannot recall a moment in my life when I had a sense of desertion by God.

*Harijan, 24-12-'38, p. 395*

(From "Letter to V. M. Tarkunde")

1. When I pray, I do not ask for anything but I simply think of some of the verses or hymns which I fancy for the moment.
2. The relation between God and myself is not only at prayer but, at all times, that of master and slave in perpetual bondage.
3. Prayer is to me the intense longing of the heart to merge myself in the Master. If a man does not pray, evidently he has no longing; there is no feeling of helplessness and when there is no helplessness, there is no need for help.

*The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi – XXXI, (1969,) p. 542*

### 37. SERVICE IS PRAYER

If I found myself entirely absorbed in the service of the community, the reason behind it was my desire for Self-realization. I had made the religion of service my own, as I felt that God could be realized only through service. And service for me was the service of India, because it came to me without my seeking, because I had an aptitude for it. I had gone to South Africa for travel, for finding an escape from Kathiawad intrigues and for gaining my own livelihood. But as I have said, I found myself in search of God and striving for self-realization.

*An Autobiography, (1969), p. 118*

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What I want to achieve,—what I have been striving and pining to achieve these thirty years,—is self-realization, to see God face to face, to attain *moksha*. I live and move and have my being in pursuit -of this goal. All that I do by way of speaking and writing, and all my ventures in the political field, are directed to this same end.

*Ibid.*, Introduction, p. x

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( From "Some Objections Answered" )

I never asked my audience to substitute the spinning wheel for the rosary. I only suggested that they could go on spinning taking the name of Narayana simultaneously. And whilst today the whole country is on fire, I think it behoves us all to fill the buckets of the spinning wheel with the water of yarn and extinguish the fire with the name of Narayana on our lips.

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Narasimha Mehta does indeed sing the praise of the rosary, and the praise is well merited where it is given. But the same Narasimha has sung:

"Of what avail is the *tilak* and the *tulsi*, of what avail is the rosary and the muttering of the Name, what avail is the grammatical interpretation of the Veda, what avail is the mastery of the letters? All these are devices to fill the belly and nothing worth without their helping to a realization of the *Para-Brahma*."

The Musalman does count the beads of his *tasbih*, and the Christian of the rosary. But both would think themselves fallen from religion if their *tasbih* and rosary prevented them from running to the succour of one who, for instance, was lying stricken with a snake-bite. Mere knowledge of the Vedas cannot make our Brahmanas spiritual preceptors. If it did, Max Muller would have become one. The Brahmana who has understood the religion of today will certainly give Vedic learning a secondary place and propagate the religion of the spinning wheel, relieve the hunger of the millions of his starving countrymen and only then, and not until then, lose himself in Vedic studies.

I have certainly regarded spinning superior to the practice of denominational religions. But that does not mean that the latter should be given up. I only mean that a Dharma which has to be observed by the followers of all religions transcends them, and hence I say that a Brahmana is a better Brahmana, a Musalman a better Musalman, a Vaishnava a better Vaishnava, if he turns the wheel in the spirit of service.

I certainly did not repeat the divine word 'Rama' nor count the beads on account of a feeling that my end was near. But I was too weak then to turn the wheel. I do count the rosary whenever it helps me in concentrating on Rama. When, however, I rise to a pitch of concentration where the rosary is more a hindrance than a help, I drop it. If it was possible for me to turn the wheel in my bed, and if I felt that it would help me in concentrating my mind on God, I would certainly leave the rosary aside and turn the wheel. If I am strong enough to turn the wheel, and I have to make a choice between counting beads or turning the wheel, I would certainly decide in favour of the wheel, making it my rosary, so long as I found poverty and starvation stalking the land. I do look forward to a time when even repeating the name of Rama will become a hindrance. When I have realized that Rama transcends even speech, I shall have no need to repeat the name. The spinning wheel, the rosary and the Ramanama

are all the same to me. They subserve the same end, they teach me the religion of service.

*Young India*, 14-8-'24, p. 267.

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(From "Letter to Shevakram Karamchand")

In my opinion, God's name and God's work go hand in hand. There is no question of preference because the two are indivisible. A parrot-like repetition of the name is worse than useless, and service or action without the consciousness that it is done in God's name and for God's sake is also valueless, and if we sometimes pass our time in merely repeating the name of the deity as we have to, it is simply a course of preparation for self-dedication, that is, service for the sake of and in the name of God, and when we are thoroughly attuned, continued service in that spirit is itself equal to the repetition of the name of the deity. In the vast majority of cases, however, the setting apart a part of our time for prayer is a vital necessity.

*The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi—XXIII*, (1967), p. 289

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(From a letter)

Devotion to duty is itself prayer. We go and pray in order to be qualified for doing actual service. But when one is engaged in actual practice of duty, prayer is merged with the execution of duty. If someone who is engaged in deep prayer, hears the cry of another who- is stung by a scorpion, she is bound to leave the prayer and run to help him. Prayer finds fulfillment in the service of the distressed.

*Bapu's Letters to the Ashram Sisters*, (1960), p. 79

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(From a letter)

Real praying from the heart brings the real work behind it. For in the end work itself becomes prayer.

(From a letter)

The real way to pray to Lord Krishna is to do in His name some little service to those who are less fortunate than ourselves.

*Ibid.*, p. 243

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(Form "Letter to Gangabehn Vaidya")

By not attending prayers in order that they might help in putting out the fire, the women offered real prayers. This is an example of non-action in action. You fulfilled the real purpose of prayers. Moreover, one can go on repeating Ramanama to oneself even while running to the place where fire has started in order to help put it out.

Finally, the person whose life is dedicated to service and who has burnt his or her egotism lives his life in the spirit of prayer. We pray morning and evening in order that we may be able to live thus, and, therefore, when a fire breaks out, or in similar circumstances, one may even drop prayers. But such occasions are rare.

[From Gujarati: *Bapuna Patro*—6: *G. S. Gangabehnne*, p. 48  
*The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*—XLIV, (1971), p. 367

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(From "Weekly Letter" by Pyarelal)

There is no worship purer or more pleasing to God than selfless service of the poor. The rich in their arrogance and intellectual pride often forget God and even question His existence. But God dwells among the poor as they cling to Him as their sole refuge and shelter. To serve the poor is therefore to serve Him.

*Young India*, 14-2-'29, p. 51

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(From "Question Box")

Q.: Would it not be better for a man to give the time he spends on the worship of God to the service of the poor? And should not true service make devotional worship unnecessary for such a man?

A.: I sense mental laziness as also agnosticism in this; question. The biggest of Karmayogis never give up devotional song or worship. Idealistically it may be said that true service of others is itself worship and that such devotees do not need to spend any time in songs etc. As a matter of fact, *bhajans* etc. are a help to true service and keep the remembrance of God fresh in the heart of the devotee.

*Harijan*, 13-10-'46, p. 357

Q.: Are not meditation and worship too sacred a duty?

A.: Meditation and worship are not exclusive things like jewels to be kept locked up in a strong box. They must be seen in every act of ours.

*Harijan*, 20-4-'35, p. 74

### 38. "THY WILL BE DONE"

I prayed for Manilal's recovery. However it was a sign not of wisdom but of a father's love. There is really only one prayer that we may offer: "Thy will be done." Someone will ask where is the sense in offering such a prayer. The answer is: Prayer should not be understood in a gross sense. We are aware of the presence of God in our heart, and in order to shake off attachment, we for the moment think of God as different from ourselves and pray to Him. That is to say, we do not wish to go where our wayward will may lead us but where the Lord takes us. We do not know whether it is good to live or to die. Therefore we should not take delight in living, nor should we tremble at the thought of death. We should be equiminded towards both. This is the ideal. It may be long before we reach it, and only a few of us can attain it. Even then we must keep it constantly in view, and the more difficult it seems of attainment, the greater should be the effort we put forth.

*The Diary of Mahadev Desai, Vol. I, (1953), pp. 118-19*

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(By Kakasaheb Kalelkar)

It was when Bapu was translating the *Ashram Bhajana- vali* (collection of devotional songs sung at the Ashram prayers) into English for the benefit of Mirabehn (Miss Slade).<sup>1</sup> He set aside a little time daily after prayers for this task and, soon, his translation was complete. There is one verse which runs: "*Jay a jay a karunabdhe, Shri Mahadeva Shambho!*" ("Victory, victory to Thee, Oh Shri Mahadeva Shambho, Ocean of Mercy!")

I have both read and made English translations of Sanskrit verses. "*Jaya jaya*" simply means "victory, victory". But Bapu had translated it: "Thy will be done." "How is this, Bapu?" I asked. He replied: "The Lord is ever victorious throughout His creation. We pray that lust, anger, etc., which are forever becoming victorious in our hearts, might be conquered and rendered impotent: that they might be routed. In other words, we pray that we might be enabled to do all

things in accordance with the will of God. For a Christian, the best rendering of this can only be 'Thy Kingdom come,' or 'Thy will be done'. After all, what do we pray for? Is it not simply that God should be ever victorious in our own hearts?"

*Stray Glimpses of Bapu*, (1960), p. 159

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1. This was in late 1930.

### 39. RESIGN TO HIS WILL

(From a letter)

A prayer can be offered in connection with some person or thing, and may even be granted. But if it is offered without any such specific end in view, it will confer a greater benefit on the world as well as ourselves. Prayer exerts an influence over ourselves; our soul becomes more vigilant, and the greater its vigilance, the wider the sphere of its influence.

Prayer is a function of the heart. We speak aloud in order to wake it up. The Power that pervades the universe is also present in the human heart. The body does not offer it any obstruction. The obstruction is something of our own making, and is removed by prayer. We can never know if a prayer has or has not yielded the desired result. I may pray for Narmada's relief from pain; even if she is free from pain afterwards, I must not assume that that is due to my prayer.

Prayer is never fruitless, but we cannot know what the fruit of it is. Nor should we imagine that it is a good thing if it yields the desired result. Here too the Gita doctrine has to be practised. We may pray for something and yet remain free from attachment. We may pray for some one's *mukti* (salvation) but should not worry whether he gets or does not get what we want for him. Even if the result is just the opposite of what we had asked for, that is no reason for the conclusion that the prayer has been fruitless.

*The Diary of Mahadev Desai*, Vol. I, (1953), p. 233

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(From "Weekly Letter" by Pyarelal)

Commenting on the allegory of *Gajendra* and *Graha*, the elephant king and the alligator that adorns the Bhagawata, Gandhiji remarked:

"The moral of the story is that God never fails his devotees in the hour of trial. The condition is that there must be a living faith in and the uttermost reliance on Him. The test of faith is that having done our duty we must be prepared to

welcome whatever He may send—joy as well as sorrow, good luck as well as bad. . . .

A man of prayer will in the first place be spared mishaps by the ever merciful Providence but if the mishaps do come he will not bewail his fate but bear it with an undisturbed peace of mind and joyous resignation to His will."

*Harijan*, 7-7-'46, p. 216

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God is the hardest taskmaster I have known on this earth, and He tries you through and through. And when you find that your faith is failing you, and you are sinking, He comes to your assistance somehow or other and proves to you that you must not lose your faith and that He is always at your beck and call, but on His terms, not on your terms. So I have found. I cannot really recall a single instance when at the eleventh hour, He has forsaken me.

*Speeches and Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, (G. A. Natesan & Co., 4th Edn.), p. 1066

#### 40. HOW TO AND WHOM TO PRAY?

(Original: "Prayer")

"Often, Sir, do you ask us to worship God, to pray but never tell us how to and whom to do so. Will you kindly enlighten me?" asks a reader of *Navajivan*.

Worshipping God is singing the praise of God. Prayer is a confession of one's unworthiness and weakness. God has a thousand names or rather, He is Nameless. We may worship or pray to Him by whichever name that pleases us. Some call Him Rama, some Krishna, others call Him Rahim, and yet others call Him God. All worship the same spirit, but as all foods do not agree with all, all names do not appeal to all. Each chooses the name according to his associations, and He being the In-Dweller, All-Powerful and Omniscient knows our innermost feelings and responds to us according to our deserts.

Worship or prayer, therefore, is not to be performed with the lips, but with the heart. And that is why it can be performed equally by the dumb and the stammerer, by the ignorant and the stupid. And the prayers of those whose tongues are nectared but whose hearts are full of poison are never heard. He, therefore, who would pray to God, must cleanse his heart. Rama was not only on the lips of Hanuman. He was enthroned in his heart. He gave Hanuman exhaustless strength. In His strength he lifted the mountain and crossed the ocean. It is faith that steers us through stormy seas, faith that moves mountains and faith that jumps across the ocean. That faith is nothing but a living, wide awake consciousness of God within. He who has achieved that faith wants nothing. Bodily diseased he is spiritually healthy, physically pure, he rolls in spiritual riches.

"But how is the heart to be cleansed to this extent?" one might well ask. The language of the lips is easily taught but who can teach the language of the heart? Only the Bhakta – the true devotee – knows it and can teach it. The Gita has defined the Bhakta in three places, and talked of him generally everywhere. But a knowledge of the definition of a Bhakta is hardly a sufficient

guide. They are rare on this earth. I have, therefore, suggested the Religion of Service as the means. God of Himself seeks for His seat the heart of him who serves his fellowmen. That is why Narasimha Mehta who "saw and knew" sang, "He is a true Vaishnava who knows, to melt at other's woe." Such was Abu Ben Adhem. He served his fellowmen, and therefore, his name topped the list of those who served God.

But who are the suffering and the woe-begone? The suppressed and the poverty-stricken. He who would be a Bhakta, therefore, must serve these by body, soul and mind. How can he who regards the "suppressed" classes as untouchables serve them by the body? He who does not even condescend to exert his body to the extent of spinning for the sake of the poor and trots out lame excuse does not know the meaning of service. An able-bodied wretch deserves no alms, but an appeal to work for his bread. Alms debase him. He who spins before the poor inviting them to do likewise serves God as no one else does. "He who gives Me even a trifle as a fruit or a flower or even a leaf in the spirit of Bhakti is my servant", says the Lord in the Bhagavadgita. As he hath his footstool where live "the humble, the lowliest and lost", spinning, therefore, for such is the greatest prayer, the greatest worship, the greatest sacrifice.

Prayer, therefore, may be done by any name. A prayerful heart is the vehicle and service makes the heart prayerful. Those Hindus who in this age serve the untouchables from a full heart truly pray; the Hindus and those others who spin prayerfully for the poor and the indigent truly pray.

*Young India*, 24-9-'25, p. 331

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(Original: "How to Think of God")

A correspondent writes:

"You say that the rule should be that during prayers, everyone should sit with closed eyes and think of nothing but God. The question arises as to how and in what form we have to think of God?"

True meditation consists in closing the eyes and ears of the mind to all else, except the object of one's devotion. Hence the closing of eyes during prayers is an aid to such concentration. Man's conception of God is naturally limited. Each one has, therefore, to think of Him as best appeals to him, provided that the conception is pure and uplifting.

*Harijan*, 18-8-'46, p. 265

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(From "Weekly Letter" by M. D.)

Prayer brings a peace, a strength and a consolation that nothing else can give. But it must be offered from the heart. When it is not offered from the heart, it is like the beating of a drum, or just the vocal effect of the throat sounds. When it is offered from the heart, it has the power to melt mountains of misery. Those who want are welcome to try its power.

*Young India*, 29-12-'27, p. 444

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(From a letter)

A person must shed all spiritual dirt at prayer time. As he is ashamed of doing anything immoral while other people are looking on, so should he be in the presence of God. But God knows our every act and every thought. There is not a single moment when we can think any thought or do any act unknown to Him. He who thus prays from the bottom of his heart will in time be filled with the spirit of God and become sinless.

*The Diary of Mahadev Desai*, Vol. I, (1953, pp. 232-33)

## 41. PUNCTUALITY AT PRAYERS

(By Kakasaheb Kalelkar)

It must have been during Bapu's tour of South Bharat in September 1927. The Tamilnad tour had ended, and we were covering Andhra by car. We reached Chikakol at about 10 p.m., and found that the local workers had organized a spinning competition between the best women spinners there, in Bapu's honour. (Chikakol Khadi is famous throughout the length and breadth of Bharat for its remarkable fineness and beauty.) We were dead tired with all the night-and-day travelling in a motor-car, and in no mood for any programmes or competitions. Mahadevbhai and I thought: "Poor Bapu can't get out of this competition, but why shouldn't we? It won't make any difference to anybody whether we go or not. Much better to snatch a little sleep when one can!" So Mahadevbhai and I went off to our sleeping places and fell fast asleep. Bapuji's bed had been prepared for him – we never knew when he came, or how he slept.

We rose at 4 a.m. for prayers. We washed our faces and were just beginning the prayers when Bapu asked: "Did you say your prayers before sleeping last night?" I replied: "I was so tired when I came to bed that I just went off to sleep, clean forgetting my prayers. I remember it just this moment, when you ask us about it."

Mahadevbhai said: "It was the same with me, but just as I was dropping off, I remembered that we had not prayed, so I sat up in bed and rectified the omission. I did not wake Kaka, though."

Then Bapu said, with indescribable pathos: "I sat for an hour or so in the competition, and when I returned, I was so tired that I, too, forgot all about prayer and went to sleep. Then, at about two o'clock, I woke up, and it flashed upon me that I had not said my nightly prayers. I felt such agony that my body was seized with a fit of trembling, and I became all wet with perspiration. I sat up in bed, and was plunged in a remorse beyond all description. How could I

forget Him by whose mercy I live, who strengthens me in all my efforts? How could I forget that *Bhagavan*? I could not get over my own carelessness. I could not sleep a wink after that. All night I sat up in bed, repenting my mistake and begging His forgiveness."

Saying this he became silent; it may be imagined with what feelings we said our morning prayers that day. Mahadevbhai sang a *bhajan* (hymn). Then Bapu said: "Even while travelling, we must have a fixed time for our evening prayers. We make a mistake in leaving our prayers till we have finished all our work and are preparing to go to bed. From today, we pray punctually at seven o'clock in the evening, no matter where we may happen to be."

We were still journeying by car. Every evening at seven o'clock, we would stop the car, and, whether we were in a forest or in a town, we would say our prayers without fail, at the appointed time.

*Stray Glimpses of Bapu*, (1960), pp. 112-14

## 42. GOD'S TIME NEVER STOPS

(From "Weekly Letter" by Pyarelal)

It should be the general rule that prayers must not be delayed for anybody on earth. God's time never stops. As a matter of fact, there is no beginning for Him or His time.

. . . How can anyone afford to miss the time of offering prayers to Him, whose watch never stops?

*Harijan, 16-6-'46, p. 183*

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(Uttered on the way to the prayer-ground on the fateful evening of 30-1-'48)

I do not like being late for the prayers. . . . Even a minute's delay for the prayer causes me great discomfort.

*The End of An Epoch, (1962), p. 41*

### 43. NEVER MISS PRAYERS

(From letters)

It is five minutes to seven. So you must now be on your way to the prayer-ground. You must keep to whatever time you might fix. I take it that all those who promised to attend prayers are attending them, except for reasons quite beyond their control.

*Bapu's Letters to Ashram Sisters, (1960), p. 3*

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It is exactly 6-50, so it is time for your morning prayers. You may miss all else but not this. It brings us all together, and all of us together with God. It is a real purifying bath. Just as our body becomes dirty without a bath, so also the pure soul appears impure unless our hearts are cleaned with prayer. Therefore, never miss prayers. You also have an opportunity to meet everyone at the 4 a.m. prayers. It is however, not possible for all ladies to attend that prayer. But at the seven o'clock prayer, they have a chance of getting together. It is possible for all of them to attend it. Mutual contact among Ashram women is very essential.

Give still further thought to the matter of prayers. I also believe that the seven o'clock meeting should not be given up. You have taken it upon yourselves as a special duty to infuse life into these meetings. For the present I can only suggest this. Those of you who have the will and the energy to attend the 4 a.m. prayers may resolve to do so, without entering into any unnecessary discussion about what others might do, and thereafter, continue to keep your resolution, in spite of every hardship, so long as health permits.

*Ibid, p. 48*

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(From "Letter to Madhavlal")

There should be no break in the prayers. Never mind if (they are offered), late. It would be better if it is not late. Even if it is late it should not be that the prayers are not offered (at all). Food can be given up but not the prayers.

*The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi—L, (1972), pp. 133-34*

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(From "Discourses on the *Gita*)

I once saw a beautiful painting in a Roman Catholic Church, the work of a gifted painter. It is the time of prayer. Women have been working in the fields, pick axes in hand. As one of them was about to dig with her pickaxe fell from her hand, she bent her body as though kneeling for prayer and started praying. The poet—for the painter is a poet—had imagined the woman as working like a machine. For these women work was worship. There is a saying in Latin which means that bodily labour is a form of worship. Anyone who believes that it is so will automatically kneel down at prayer time. A person who has resolved that he will always get up at four will roll up his bed as the clock, strikes four. If such a person misses praying at prayer time, he will feel weary and oppressed and will not be able to concentrate on any work.

*The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi—XXXII, (1969), p. 201*

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(From "Letter to Shivabhai G. Patel")

I got your letter. One must never forget prayer. As the body craves for food when it is hungry and does not forget about it, so the soul should yearn to pray. The prayer may consist of nothing more than Ramanama, but one ought not to forget it in any circumstances. To the extent that you forget it occasionally, to that extent it is an external thing to you. Prayer must become so intimately a part of one's being that at last one's every breath is accompanied by Ramanama. As an eyelid goes on doing its work, one will go on repeating Rama's name with every breath.

*The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi—XLIX, (1972), p. 71*

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#### 44. ATTENDANCE AT PRAYERS

(From "Letter to Chhaganlal Joshi")

I hear that attendance at prayers is again becoming thinner. It should not be necessary for me to explain at this hour of the day that no one should expect someone else to stimulate his or her interest in prayers. The interest should be felt within. As the body needs food and feels hungry, so the soul needs and feels hungry for prayer. Prayer is a form of communication with God. So long as our need for attendance at prayers is not the same as that for attendance at meals, for which we require no one to goad us, so long our faith in God is weak; or, though we subscribe to the rules of the Ashram we do not observe them and to that extent we are unfaithful to it and violate the vow of truth. Anyone who realizes this will not remain absent at prayers—whether morning or evening—without some strong reason.

[From Gujarati (*Bapuna Patro-7: Shri Chhaganlal Joshine,*) pp. 24-26]

*The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi—XXXVIII, (1970), p. 197*

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(From "Letter to Narandas Gandhi")

If we strive for truth, we would not be content merely to attend prayers but would try to concentrate our attention on them. We would try to follow the songs and the discourses, be punctual in attending the prayers and respond to them as to a fresh experience every day. The freshness does not consist in the variety of *bhajans* or other recitations, but should result from the increasing purity of our heart. We should grow daily more contented and feel greater peace of mind. If we do not have this experience, the fault will lie not with the quality of the prayers but with the element of untruthfulness in us. If we attend the prayers with sincere devotion to truth, we would experience nothing but peace. The faithful who visit temples do not observe the lack of cleanliness in them, or pay attention to the hypocrisy of the priest. They do not see the image as a stone. They experience peace in the midst of noise and return from

the temples purified in heart. A person like me who feels suffocated by the noise there and sees the image only as a piece of stone should never visit a temple. God appears to us in the form in which we worship Him. For He is not outside of us. He is in the hearts of us all. If we understand this truth, our simplest and smallest actions would shed luster on us and help us to see God. In order that we may learn this, prayers, spinning, and other daily duties are like a spiritual lighthouse to us or a right angle which is the standard of measurement.

*The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi—X.LV, (1971), pp. 21-22*

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(From "Discourses on the *Gita*")

You ought to get up in time and attend prayers every day. You may excuse yourselves from other duties, but never from prayers. You should cultivate such a state of mind that for half an hour you will have only one thought in your mind, and no other. Everyone should set apart some time in this manner for reflection. It provides an opportunity to feel one with all living creatures.

*The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi—XXXII, (1969), p. 220*

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(From a letter to Esther Faering)

As I have already said, you have come to the Ashram not to lose your Christianity, but to perfect it.

If you don't feel the presence of God at the prayer meetings then remember that the names Rama and Krishna signify the same as Jesus to you.

You should most decidedly not attend these meetings. You should go and pray in your private chamber. The prayer meetings are not meant to force anyone into a position. They are meant for free men and women. The children must attend. Those who abstain from sheer laziness must attend. But for you, no one can misunderstand your abstinence. You will therefore please do that which gives you the greatest peace. The Ashram is nothing if it does not enable you to

realize God more and more fully day by day. If on Sundays or any other days you would go to Church of course you shall do so.

*"My Dear Child"*, (1959), pp. 45-46

## 45. THE SPIRITUAL VALUE OF SILENCE

(From "An Address to Missionaries")

It has often occurred to me that a seeker after truth has to be silent. I know the wonderful efficacy of silence. I visited a Trappist monastery in South Africa. A beautiful place it was. Most of the inmates of that place were under a vow of silence. I inquired of the Father the motive of it and he said the motive is apparent: 'We are frail human beings. We do not know very often what we say. If we want to listen to the still small Voice that is always speaking within us, it will not be heard if we continually speak.' I understood that precious lesson. I know the secret of silence.

*Young India*, 6-8-'25, pp. 274-75

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Experience has taught me that silence is a part of the spiritual discipline of a votary of truth. Proneness to exaggerate, to suppress or modify the truth, wittingly or unwittingly, is a natural weakness of man, and silence is necessary in order to surmount it. A man of few words will rarely be thoughtless in his speech; he will measure every word. We find so many people impatient to talk. There is no chairman of a meeting who is not pestered with notes for permission to speak. And whenever the permission is given the speaker generally exceeds the time limit, asks for more time, and keeps on talking without permission. All this talking can hardly be said to be of any benefit to the world. It is so much waste of time.

*An Autobiography*, (1969), p. 46

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(From "Notes")

When one comes to think of it one cannot help feeling that nearly half the misery of the world would disappear if we, fretting mortals, knew the virtue of silence. Before modern civilization came upon us, at least six to eight hours of silence out of twenty-four were vouchsafed to us. Modern civilization has

taught us to convert night into day and golden silence into brazen din and noise. What a great thing it would be if we in our busy lives could retire into ourselves each day for at least a couple of hours and prepare our minds to listen in to the Voice of the Great Silence. The Divine Radio is always singing if we could only make ourselves ready to listen to It, but it is impossible to listen in without silence. St. Theresa has used a charming image to sum up the sweet result of silence.

"You will at once feel your senses gather themselves together; they seem like bees which return to the hive and there shut themselves up to work at the making of honey: and this will take place without effort or care on your part. God thus rewards the violence which your soul has been doing to itself; and gives to it such a domination over the senses that a sign is enough when it desires to recollect itself, for them to obey and so gather themselves together. At the first call of the will they come back more and more quickly. At last after many and many exercises of this kind, God disposes them to a state of absolute repose and of perfect contemplation."

*Harijan, 24-9-'38, p. 267*

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Silence is a great help to a seeker after truth like myself. In the attitude of silence the soul finds the path in a clearer light, and what is elusive and deceptive resolves itself into crystal clearness. Our life is a long and arduous quest after Truth, and the soul requires inward restfulness to attain its full height.

*Truth is God, (1959), p. 53*

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The observance of silence is equally important, for through it we pray to the Almighty to keep us always awake to our responsibilities.

*Bapu—My Mother (1955), p. 46*

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(From "Dr. Mott's Second Visit" by M. D.)

Dr. Mott concluded his visit in 1936 with a question on silence. He had done so during a brief flying visit to Ahmedabad in 1928 and during this visit too he asked if Gandhiji had continued to find it necessary in his spiritual quest.

*Gandhiji:* I can say that I am an everlastingly silent man now. Only a little while ago I have remained completely silent nearly two months and the spell of that silence has not yet broken. I broke it today when you came. Nowadays I go into silence at prayer time every evening and break it for visitors at 2 o'clock. I broke it today when you came. It has now become both a physical and spiritual necessity for me. Originally it was taken to relieve the sense of pressure. Then I wanted time for writing. After, however, I had practised it for some time I saw the spiritual value of it. It suddenly flashed across my mind that that was the time when I could best hold communion with God. And now I feel as though I was naturally built for silence. Of course I may tell you that from my childhood I have been noted for my silence. I was silent at school, and in my London days I was taken for a silent drone by friends.

*Dr. Mott:* In this connection you put me in mind of two texts from the Bible:

"My soul, be thou silent unto God."

"Speak Lord, for Thy servant hearkeneth."

*Harijan, 10-12-'38, p. 373*

## 46. TAMASI TAPAS

(From "Sparks from the Sacred Fire—VII" by M. D.)

A dear friend and keen seeker after truth, who has gone through several fasts and has long been on a pilgrimage of search, meeting *sadhus* and mortifying the flesh, has written saying that he has now taken a 12 years' silence, that, not content with this, he proposes to have his lips sewn up with thin wire and that off and on he takes a fortnight's fast and now practically lives on raw flour soaked in water! Here is Gandhiji's reply:

"I was delighted to have your letter after months, but I was pained also. I hold that the remedies you are adopting for self-realization are not right. Silence of the sewn-up lips is no silence. One may achieve the same result by chopping off one's tongue, but that too would not be silence. He is truly silent who, having the capacity to speak, utters no idle word. The penance you are going through is the *tamasi tapas*—blind penance—described in the Gita. Eating raw flour is against all dietetic rules, and certainly not enjoined by religion. If- you must have uncooked food, you can live on fruits and nuts. You may add milk to it and that will make an ideal dietary. I wish you could shake yourself free of this self-torture. Ponder over Kabir's song:

'Oh, good man! Natural communion is best. Ever since by the Grace of God it was achieved, it has been growing. Wherever I wander it, is a circuit round the Deity, whatever I do is an act of service, every lying down of mine is an act of prostration before God. Every utterance of mine is God's name—I worship no other God—and all hearing is a remembrance of God. Eating and drinking are acts of worship and living in a house or in the wilderness are the same to me. I shut not my eyes neither do I stuff my ears; to no torture do I subject myself. I open my eyes to find nothing but the beautiful manifestation of God everywhere to greet and delight me.

My mind ever intent on Him, all corrupt thought has left me; so very much I am engrossed in contemplation of Him that there is no room in me for aught else. Kabir says: This is a state to be silently enjoyed but I have dared to sing about it. It is a state beyond misery and bliss, I am merged in it.'

*Harijan*, 24-6-'33, p. 5

## 47. COMMUNION OF SILENCE

(From an article by Pyarelal which appeared under the above title)

Last week I referred to the Sunday silent prayer meeting of the Quakers which Gandhiji attended. He has been attending it every Sunday since his arrival here.\* Quakers believe that "in corporate silent waiting, God does speak to us and we can understand His will in the common walks of life". As Shri Ranjit M. Chetsingh explained at the beginning of the service last week quoting an early Quaker, "The thinking busy soul excludes the voice of God. Be still and cool from thine own self." Said George Fox, "The silence of a religious and spiritual worship is not a drowsy unthinking state of mind but a withdrawing of it from all visible objects and vain imaginings."

Making the Quaker meeting which he had attended the theme of his address at the evening prayer gathering, Gandhiji described how his own experience tallied with that of the Quakers. "Emptying of the mind of all conscious processes of thought and filling it with the spirit of God unmanifest brings one ineffable peace and attunes the soul with the Infinite." The question may however be raised, should not one's whole life be an unbroken hymn of praise and prayer to the Maker? Why then have a separate time for prayer at all? Brother Lawrence testified that "with him the set times of prayers were not different from other times; that he retired to pray according to the directions of his superior, but that he did not want such retirement, nor asked for it, because his greatest business did not divert him from God." Gandhiji does not question that view. "I agree," he observed in his discourse, "that if a man could practise the presence of God all the twenty four hours, there would be no need for a separate time for prayer." But most people find that impossible. The sordid everyday world is too much with them. For them the practice of complete withdrawal of the mind from all outward things, even though it might be only for a few minutes every day, would be found to be of infinite use. Silent communion would help them to experience an undisturbed peace in the midst of turmoil, to curb anger and cultivate patience. "When the mind is

completely filled with His spirit one cannot harbour ill-will or hatred towards any one and reciprocally the enemy will shed his enmity and become a friend. It is not my claim that I have always succeeded in converting enemies into friends, but in numerous cases it has been my experience that when the mind is filled with His peace all hatred ceases. An unbroken succession of world teachers since the beginning of time have borne testimony to the same. I claim no merit for it. I know it is due entirely to God's grace. Let us then in the sacred week seek His grace through the communion of silence and may be the experience will abide with us forever afterwards.

*Harijan, 28-4-'46, p. 109*

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\* i.e. Delhi

## 48. SILENT PRAYERS

(From "Rangila Rasul")

As I believe the silent prayer is often mightier than any overt act in my helplessness. I continuously pray in the faith that the prayer of a pure heart never goes unanswered. And, with all the strength at my command, I try to become a pure instrument for acceptable prayer.

*Young India*, 22-9-'27, p. 321.

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(From "Letter to Premabehn Kantak")

I had two aims in practising silent prayer. One was, of course, to give rest to the mind. But it was difficult to turn the mind inward except through such prayer.

*The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi—XLIX*, (1972), p. 455

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(From "Woman's Special Mission")

My faith is increasing in the efficacy of silent prayer. It is by itself an act—perhaps the highest act, requiring the most refined diligence.

*Harijan*, 5-11-'38, p. 317

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(From a prayer speech April 7, 1946)

I greatly admire these silent prayers. We must devote a part of our time to such prayers. They afford peace of mind. I have experienced this in my own life. Notwithstanding my manifold activities, I devote as much time as possible to prayer.

*Food for the Soul*, (1957), p. 55

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A silent prayer is often more effective than the spoken word consciously uttered.

*The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi,—XXXVIII, (1970), p. 281*

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(From "Prayer Discourses" by Pyarelal)

Peace and order are -necessary at all gatherings, but are specially so at prayer gatherings. People come together for prayers in order to obtain peace, to hear God's name and to recite it. Therefore, those who come should really attune themselves even at the start from their homes. Let them be silent and let their thoughts dwell as they walk, on prayer. Otherwise coming to prayer was useless.

*Harijan, 19-5-'46, p. 135*

## 49. SILENCE DURING PRAYERS

(From a letter)

Five minutes' silence during the evening prayer was suggested by me. It would be better to have the same period of silence in the morning also. If the congregation has its heart in the matter, all sounds must cease by and by. Even the children would learn to co-operate. I have attended meetings where silence was observed for half an hour in England. Silence is looked upon as a very important thing among our people. *Samadhi* means silence. *Muni* (sage) and *mauna* (sagehood, silence) are both derived from the same root. It is true that when we practise silence at first, many thoughts enter our minds and we even begin to doze. Silence is intended to remedy these defects.

We are accustomed to talk much and hear loud sounds. Silence therefore seems difficult. A little practice however enables us to like it, and when we like it it gives us a sense of ineffable peace. We are seekers of truth. We must therefore understand what silence means and observe it accordingly. We can certainly take Ramanama during silence. The fact is that we should prepare the mind for it. We shall realize its value if we bestow a little thought on it.

Can we not sit steadily in the congregation for five minutes? Have you ever been at a dramatic performance? Talking is prohibited in many theatres. Enthusiasts like myself will be there an hour before the play begins. In their enthusiasm they do not mind being silent for that hour. But that is not all. The play takes 4 or 5 hours, during which the spectator has to observe silence. But he likes it all the same. The silence is not burdensome to him because his mind is attuned to it. Why then can we not be silent for 5 minutes for God's sake? If there is a flaw in this argument, do let me know. But if it is sound, keep silence with interest and plead on my behalf with those who are opposed to it.

*The Diary of Mahadev Desai*, Vol. I, (1953), pp. 312-13.

(From "Prayer Discourses" by Pyarelal)

"True culture requires that there should be perfect peace in the prayer ground at the time of the prayer." There should be an atmosphere of solemnity as in a church, a mosque or a temple. He (Gandhiji) knew that many of the temples were full of clamour. It had hurt him deeply. "We go to the temple to worship not the stone or the metal image but God who resides in it. The image becomes what man makes of it. It has no power independently of the sanctity with which it is invested by the worshipper. Therefore everyone, including children, should observe perfect silence at the time of prayer."

*Harijan, 28-4-'46, p. 112*

## 50. HOW I INTRODUCED CONGREGATIONAL PRAYER

(From "Satyagraha—The Art of Living and Dying" by Pyarelal)

I introduced the practice of having congregational prayer some time before the commencement of the South African Satyagraha struggle. The Indian community there was faced with a grave peril. We did all that was humanly possible. All methods of seeking redress, agitation through the press and the platform, petitions and deputations, were tried out but proved of no avail. What was the Indian community consisting of a mere handful of illiterate indentured labourers mostly, with a sprinkling of free merchants, hawkers etc., to do in the midst of an overwhelming majority of Negroes and Whites ? The Whites were fully armed. It was clear that if the Indians were to come into their own, they must forge a weapon which would be different from and infinitely superior to the force which the White settlers commanded in such ample measure. It was then that I introduced congregational prayer in Phoenix and Tolstoy Farm as a means for training in the use of the weapon of Satyagraha or soul force.

The singing of Ramadhun is the most important part of congregational prayer. The millions may find it difficult to correctly recite and understand the Geeta verses and the Arabic and Zend Avesta prayers, but everybody can join in chanting Ramanama or God's name. It is as simple as it is effective. Only it must proceed from the heart. In its simplicity lies its greatness and the secret of its universality. Anything that millions can do together becomes charged with a unique power.

I congratulate you on your success in the mass singing of Ramadhun without any previous training. But it is capable of further improvement. You should practise it in your homes. I am here to testify that when it is sung in tune to the accompaniment of *tal*, the triple accord of the voice, the accompaniment and thought creates an atmosphere of ineffable sweetness and strength which no words can describe.

*Harijan*, 7-4-'46, p. 73

## 51. CONGREGATIONAL PRAYER

(From "Weekly Letter" by Pyarelal)

It becomes a man to remember his Maker all the twenty-four hours. If that cannot be done we should at least congregate at prayer time to renew our covenant with God. Whether we are Hindus or Musalmans, Parsis, Christians or Sikhs, we all worship the same God. Congregational prayer is a means for establishing the essential human unity through common worship. Mass singing of Ramadhun and the beating of *tal* are its outward expression. If they are not a mechanical performance but are an echo of the inner unison, as they should be, they generate a power and an atmosphere of sweetness and fragrance which has only to be seen to be realized.

*Harijan*, 3-3-'46, pp. 25-26

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(From "The Leave-taking" by M. D. being Gandhiji's discourse at the last prayer meeting held before his leaving Bangalore)

For me it [prayer] has been both a joy, and a privilege, in as much as I have felt its elevating influence. I ask you to keep it up. You may not know the verses, you may not know Sanskrit and the hymns, but Ramanama is there for all, the heritage handed down from ages. And I tell you why I ask you to continue this congregational prayer. Man is both an individual and a social being. As an individual he may have his prayer during all the waking hours, but as a member of society he has to join in the congregational prayer. I for one may tell you that when I am alone I do have my prayer, but I do feel very lonely without a congregation to share the prayer with me. I knew and even now know very few of you, but the fact that I had the evening prayers with you was enough for me. Among the many memories that will abide in my heart after I leave Bangalore, not the least will be the prayer meetings. But I shall have my congregation at the next place I reach, and forget the wrench. For one who accepts the brotherhood of man and fatherhood of God, should find a congregation wherever he goes, and he may not hug or nurse the feeling of parting or

separation. Please, therefore, keep up the prayer. You can form your own congregation in your own places, and as a last resource one's family can become one's congregation well enough. Do meet every evening at this hour, learn a few hymns, learn the Gita, do the best and the most you can for the purpose of self-purification.

*Young India*, 8-9-'27, p. 295

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(From "Collective Prayer")

Q.: You believe in mass prayer. Is congregational worship as practised today, a true prayer? In my opinion, it is a degrading thing and therefore dangerous. Jesus said: "When thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are, but enter into thine inner chamber and having shut thy door pray to the Father which is in secret." Most people in a crowd are inattentive and unable to concentrate. Prayer then becomes hypocrisy. The Yogi is aware of this. Should not the masses, therefore, be taught self-examination which is the true prayer?

A.: I hold that congregational worship held by me, is true prayer for a collection of men. The convener is a believer and no hypocrite. If he were one, the prayer would be tainted at the source. The men and women who attend do not go to any orthodox prayer from which they might have to gain an earthly end. The bulk of them have no contact with the convener. Hence it is presumed, they do not come for show. They join in because they believe that they somehow or other, acquire merit by having common prayer. That most or some persons are inattentive or unable to concentrate, is very true. That merely shows that they are beginners. Neither inattention nor inability to concentrate are any proof of hypocrisy or falsity. It would be, if they pretended to be attentive when they were not. On the contrary, many have often asked me what they should do, when they are unable to concentrate.

The saying of Jesus quoted in the question, is wholly inapplicable. Jesus was referring to individual prayer and to hypocrisy underlying it. There is nothing in the verse quoted, against collective prayer. I have remarked often enough that without individual prayer, collective prayer is not of much use. I hold that

individual prayer is a prelude to collective, as the latter, when it is effective, must lead to the individual. In other words, when a man has got to the stage of heart prayer, he prays always, whether in the secret or in the multitude.

I do not know what the questioner's Yogi does or does not. I know that the masses when they are in tune with the Infinite, naturally resort to self-examination. All real prayer must have that end.

*Harijan, 22-9-'46, p. 319*

## 52. CO-OPERATIVE PRAYER

(From a prayer speech: June 27, 1945)

The object of our attending prayers is to commune with God and turn the searchlight inwards so that, with God's help, we can overcome our weaknesses.

I believe that one imbibes pure thought in the company of the pure. Even if there is only one pure man, the rest would be affected by that one man's purity. The condition is that we attend the prayers with that intention; otherwise our coming to the prayers is meaningless.

I go further and maintain that even if we all had our weaknesses but came to the (prayer) meeting with the intention of removing them, our collective effort made from day to day would quicken the progress of reform. For, even as co-operation in the economic or political field is necessary, so is co-operation much more necessary on the moral plane. That is the meaning of the prayer meetings which I have been holding since my return to India.

I, therefore, appeal to you to sit absolutely quiet with your eyes closed, so as to shut yourselves off from outside thoughts for a few minutes at least. This co-operative prayer needs no fasts, no advertisement. It must be free from hypocrisy.

*Food for the Soul*, (1957), pp. 63-64

### 53. MY FAITH IN PUBLIC PRAYER

(From a prayer speech: April 12, 1945)

Speaking for myself, I can say that I can do, and have often done, without food for days on end, but I cannot do without prayers even for a single day. Individual prayer is there, but no one should fight shy of collective prayer. Man is a social being. If men and women can eat together, play together and work together, why should they not pray together? Why should anyone feel the need to pray away from everybody's gaze? Is there anything sinful or shameful in prayer that it should not be said in public?

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#### Crowds Attend My Prayers

For close on 50 years, I have been a believer in public prayer. From my earliest days in South Africa, I had among my associates and co-workers men and women of every religion—Hindus, Muslims, Christians and Parsis—who all used to join me in the prayer. In India, men and women in crowds attend my prayers wherever I go. I have been told that one reason why people feel no interest in community prayers may be that they do not come to attend the prayers; they come just to have my *darshan*. Even if it is so they come because they want to join me—a man of prayer.

*Food for the Soul*, (1957), pp. 61-62

#### 54. INDIVIDUAL PRAYER

Though I have already written once on this subject, I feel that I should again write something about its importance. It seems to me that they do not realize the necessity of individual prayer. The idea of community prayers arose from the individual's need for prayer. If individuals do not feel such a need, how can a community? Community prayers also are for the benefit of individuals. They help people in their effort to attain knowledge of the self—for self-purification. It is, therefore, necessary that all of us should understand the importance of individual prayer. As soon as a child learns to understand things, its mother ought to teach it to pray. This practice is common to all religions.

There are at least two clear times for such prayer, that is, we should turn our mind to the Lord within immediately on awakening in the morning and when closing our eyes for sleep in the evening. During the rest of the day, every man and woman who is spiritually awake will think of God when doing anything and do that with Him as witness. Such a person will never do anything evil, and a time will come when he or she will think every thought with God as witness and as its Master. This will be a state in which one will have reduced oneself to a cipher. Such a person, who lives constantly in the sight of God, will every moment feel Rama dwelling in his heart.

For such prayers, no special *mantra* or *bhajan* is necessary. Though generally a *mantra* is recited at the commencement and conclusion of every religious act, that is not at all necessary. We have only to turn our thoughts to God, no matter by what name we call Him, by what method and in what condition. Very few form such a habit. If most people followed this practice, there would be less sin and evil in this world and our dealings with one another would be pure. In order that we may attain such a pure state, everybody should pray at least at the two times which I have mentioned. Each person may fix other hours, too, according to his convenience, and gradually increase their frequency so that, ultimately his every breath will be accompanied with Ramanama.

Such individual prayer consumes no time at all. It requires not time but wakefulness. As we don't feel that the unceasing action of blinking consumes any time, so also we do not feel that praying inwardly does. But we are aware that the eye-lids are doing their work; similarly prayer should go on constantly in our heart. Anybody who wishes to pray in this manner should know that he cannot do with an impure heart. He must, therefore, banish all impurity from his heart when praying. As one feels ashamed of doing anything wicked when being observed by somebody, so also should one feel ashamed of acting similarly in the sight of God. But God watches every action and knows every thought of ours. Hence there can be no moment when we can do anything or think any thought unobserved by Him. Thus, anybody who prays to God with his heart will in the end become filled with Him and so become sinless.

*The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi—L, (1972), pp. 245-46*

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(From "Letter to Manibehn Patel")

I can easily understand your preferring group prayer, for you started praying in that manner. But you must also pray by yourself, even if it be only for one minute. Our aspiration should be that ultimately we shall continually and silently go on repeating God's name in our heart, and that is impossible unless one forms the habit of praying by oneself. One can pray by oneself even while lying in bed, bathing, eating or doing any other work. Thus it can never be a burden. On the contrary, such prayer will lighten one's heart—it ought to do so. If you do not get such experience, then you may know that your prayer is not from the heart.

[From Gujarati: *Bapuna Patro—4: Manibehn Patelne*, pp. 84-5]

*Ibid.*, p. 136

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(From "Letter to Ramnath 'Simian' ")

Individual prayer alone can be the basis of congregational prayer. My emphasis on the latter does not at all mean that I attach greater importance to it. Since

we are not used to congregational prayer, I have attempted to show the need for it. What you can experience in seclusion is certainly difficult, if not impossible, to experience in a group. I have also noticed that some people cannot pray except in a group. For such people individual prayer is essential. I would also admit that one can do without congregational prayer but certainly not without individual prayer.

*The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi—LI, (1972), p. 304*

## 55. CONCENTRATION DURING PRAYERS

(From "Letter to Premabehn Katak")

I think I do command concentration, but not well enough to satisfy me. I try earnestly to cultivate such concentration, but I am not impatient.

*The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi—XLIX, (1972), p. 455*

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(From "Notes")

Q.: Is it possible that during prayers, for thousands who assemble at your prayer gatherings, to concentrate their minds on anything whatever?

A.: I can only answer yes. For, if I did not believe in mass prayer, I should cease to hold public prayers. My experience confirms my belief. Success depends upon the purity of the leader and the faith of the audience. I know instances in which the audience had faith and the leader was an impostor. Such cases will continue to happen. But truth like the sun shines in the midst of the darkness of untruth. The result in my case will be known probably after my death.

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(From "A Letter")

Even if your mind wanders when praying, you should keep up the practice. You should retire to a secluded spot, sit in the correct posture and try to keep out all thoughts. Even if they continue to come, you should nevertheless complete the prayer. Gradually the mind will come under control. The Gita also says that the mind is restless, but it tells us that with patient effort we can bring it under control. "We shall never willingly accept defeat, though we lose our life in the struggle."

*The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi—XLIX (1972), p. 446*

## 56. COMPULSORY PRAYER

(From "Question Box")

Q.: I am a worker in the Rajasthan branch of the A.I.S.A. I believe in prayer but some of my colleagues do not. Still they have got to join in prayer under the rules of the *Sanstha*. They are afraid that, if they refuse, they would lose their job. My view is that the *Sanstha* pays wages to its workers for their eight hours' work. What right has it to insist upon including compulsory participation in prayer by their workers into the bargain.

A.: There can be no such thing as compulsory prayer. A prayer to be prayer must be voluntary. But nowadays people entertain curious ideas about compulsions. Thus, if the rules of your institution require every inmate—paid or unpaid—to attend common prayer, in my opinion you are bound to attend it as you are to attend to your other duties. Your joining the institution was a voluntary act. You knew or ought to have known its rules. Therefore, your attendance at prayer I would regard as a voluntary act, even as I would treat your other work under the contract. If you joined the institution merely because of the wages it offered you should have made it clear to the manager that you could not attend prayer. If in spite of your objection you entered the institution without stating your objection, you did a wrong thing for which you should make expiation. This can be done in two ways—by joining the prayer with your heart in it, or by resigning and paying such compensation as may be necessary for the loss caused by your sudden resignation. Everyone joining an institution owes it to obey the rules framed by the management from time to time. When any new rule is found irksome, it is open to the objector to leave the institution in accordance with the provisions made for resignation. But he may not disobey them whilst he is in it.

*Harijan*, 13-7-'40, p. 194

## 57. THE MALADY OF INTOLERANCE

(From "Another Delhi Interlude")

The prayer meeting began today as usual. When the verses from the Koran were being recited a member of the audience objected to the recitation. He was arrested by the policeman but Gandhiji immediately stopped the prayer, and requested the policeman who had arrested him to set him free.

He would be ashamed to pray, he said, where a man had been arrested for doing what he had done. He would leave the place, he said only if he were requested to do so by the Mehtars. He would not wait even to consult the trustees as they were after all the trustees of the Mehtars.

Shri G. L. Thatte, General Secretary of the Anti- Pakistan Front was arrested today outside the Valmiki Temple just before Gandhiji came out for the evening prayers.

Earlier in the day Shri Thatte had sent a letter to Gandhiji informing him of his intention to object to the recitation of the verses from the Koran at the prayer.

Another person was arrested a little later when he took exception to the recitation of Koranic verses during the prayers and shouted *Hindu Dharmaki Jay*. Gandhiji then discontinued the prayers.

Gandhiji requested the police to set the man free as it put him (Gandhiji) to shame if anybody was arrested for objecting to what he did.

Gandhiji deplored such narrow-mindedness on the part of the people. Mere shouting of slogan, would not carry Hinduism anywhere, he said. He was at a loss to understand why some Hindus objected to his reading the Koran verses in his prayer. If at places the Muslims had not behaved as they should, then it did not mean that the Hindus should retaliate by opposing the reading of the Koran.

The verse from the Koran that was being recited, Gandhiji said, was a mighty prayer in praise of God. How did it harm the Hindu religion if the prayer was

recited in the Arabic language? He who said so knew neither his religion nor his duty. That prayer could also be recited in a temple.

He had been told by a friend that a prayer with the same meaning was also found in the Yajurveda. Those who had studied the Hindu scriptures knew that among the 108 Upanishads there was one called the Allopanishad. Did not the man who wrote it know his religion? It was said that Guru Nanak himself went to Arabia in search of truth during his religious wanderings.

No religion in the world, Gandhiji continued, could live without self-suffering. A faith gained in strength only when people were willing to lay down their lives for it. The tree of life had to be watered with the blood of martyrs, who had laid down their lives without killing their opponents or intending any harm to them. That was the root of Hinduism and of all other religions.

*Harijan*, 11-5-'47, p. 147

## 58. A WORD TO OBJECTORS

(From "Gandhiji's Post-prayer Speeches")

As one person in the audience objected to the *Al Fateha* being recited, prayers were not held on the Birla House lawn. Gandhiji, however, addressed the audience. He said that he was not going to argue with the objector. He realized the anger that raged in people's hearts today. The atmosphere was so surcharged that he thought it right to respect even one objector, but this by no means meant that he gave up God or His worship in his heart. Prayer demanded a pure atmosphere. One thing that everyone should take to heart from such objections was that those who were anxious to serve must have endless patience and tolerance. One must never seek to impose one's views on others

Though I believe that I was wise in having yielded to a solitary objector and refrained from holding public prayer, it is not improper to examine the incident a little more fully. The prayer was public only in the sense that no member of the public was debarred from attending it. It was on private premises. Propriety required that those only should attend who believed whole-heartedly in the prayer including verses from the Koran. Indeed the rule should be applicable to prayer held even on public grounds. A prayer meeting is not a debating assembly. It is possible to conceive prayer meetings of many communities on the same plot of land. Decency requires that those who are opposed to particular prayers would abstain from attending the meetings they object to. The reverse would make any meeting impossible without disturbance. Freedom of worship, even of public speech, would become a farce if interference became the order of the day. In decent society the exercise of this elementary right should not need the protection of the bayonet. It should command universal acceptance.

*Harijan*, 5-10-'47, p. 353

## 59. ILL-INFORMED OBJECTORS

(From "Gandhiji's Post-Prayer Speeches")

This evening when as usual before the prayer meeting the audience was asked if there was any objector to the Koran verses being recited as part of the prayer, one member spoke up and persisted in his objection. Gandhiji had made it clear that if there was such objection, he would neither have public prayer nor the after- prayer speech on current events. Consequently, he sent word that there would be neither prayer nor speech before the public. But the gathering would not disperse without seeing Gandhiji. He, therefore, went to the rostrum and said a few words on the reason for abstention and the working of Ahimsa as he understood it. He said that it was unseemly for anyone to object to the prayer especially, when it was on a private lawn. Nevertheless, his Ahimsa warned him against disregarding even one objector when an overwhelming majority were likely to overawe one person into silence. It would be otherwise if the whole audience objected. It would then be his duty to have the prayer even at the risk of being molested. There was also the further consideration that the majority should not be disappointed for the sake of one objector. The remedy was simple. If the majority restrained themselves and entertained no anger against, or evil design on, the solitary objector, it would be his duty to hold the prayer. The possibility, however, was that if the whole audience was non-violent in intention and action, the objector would restrain himself. Such, he held, was the working of non-violence. . . .

Shri Brij Krishnaji had reported that there was a much larger audience than usual and about ten objectors to recitation from the Koran. . . . The objectors were perfectly restrained and courteous. Gandhiji was also told that there was a suppressed objection from a much larger number. Gandhiji, before proceeding with the prayer spoke to the meeting. He said he was glad that the people were open enough to register their objection. He did not like to think that people came not to share the worship of God but they came to see him or hear him because he was called a Mahatma or because of his long service of the nation. The prayer was all-inclusive. God was known by many names. In the last

analysis the names were as many as human beings. It was rightly said that even animals, birds and stones adored God. They would find in the *Bhajanavali* a hymn by a Muslim saint which said that the chirp of birds in the morning and evening signified that they adored their Maker. There was no sense in objecting to any part of the prayer because it was selected from the Koran or from any other scripture. Whatever might be the shortcomings of certain Muslims (no matter what their number was), the objection could not apply to a whole community much less to the Prophet or any other or his message. He, the speaker, had gone through the whole of the Koran. He had gained by it, not lost by it. He felt that he was a better Hindu for the reading of the world's scriptural books. He knew that there were hostile critics of the Koran. A friend from Bombay who had many Muslim friends had put before him a conundrum. What was the teaching of the Prophet about the Kafirs? Were not the Hindus Kafirs according to the Koran? He had long come to the conclusion that they were not. But he spoke to his Muslim friends about the matter. They spoke from knowledge. They assured him that Kafir in the Koran meant a non-believer. They said that the Hindus were not because they believed in one God. If they went by what the hostile critics said, they would condemn the Koran and the Prophet as they would condemn Krishna who was depicted as a dissolute being having sixteen hundred *gopis*. He silenced his critics by saying that his Krishna was immaculate. He would never bow his head before a rake. The God they worshipped with him every evening was in everyone and was all powerful. Therefore, they could have no enemy and they could fear none because God was in them and by them every moment. Such being the nature of the congregational worship, he would prefer to have no such worship if they could not with their whole heart and without reservation join the prayer. If they could, they would find that they daily gathered strength to enable them to dispel the darkness that surrounded them. On Gandhiji asking the audience frankly and fearlessly to express their opinion, they lustily said that they wanted the prayer and if there was an interruption they would bear no anger or malice against the objectors. The prayer then went on in the usual manner.

*Harijan*, 9-11-'47, pp. 406-407

## 60. FASTING AND PRAYER

(From "Fasting")

Fasting is an institution as old as Adam. It has been resorted to for self-purification or for some ends noble as well as ignoble. Buddha, Jesus and Mohammed fasted so as to see God face to face. Ramchandra fasted for the sea to give way for his army of monkeys. Parvati fasted to secure Mahadev himself as her Lord and Master. In my fasts I have but followed these great examples, no doubt for ends much less noble than theirs.

Mere physical capacity to take it is no qualification for it. It is of no use without a living faith in God. It should never be a mechanical effort nor a mere imitation. It must come from the depth of one's soul.

*Harijan*, 18-3-'39, p. 56

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(From "With Gandhiji in Burma" by M. D.)

We have it in our Shastras that whenever things go wrong, good people and sages go in for *tapasya*, otherwise known as austerities. Gautama himself, when he saw oppression, injustice and death around him, and when he saw darkness in front of him, at the back of him, and each side of him, went out in the wilderness and remained there fasting and praying in search of light. And if such penance was necessary for him who was infinitely greater than all of us put together, how much more necessary is it for us?

*Young India*, 18-4-1929, p. 126

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(From "Notes")

My religion teaches me that whenever there is distress which one cannot remove, one must fast and pray.

*Young India*, 25-9-1924, p. 319

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(From "All about the Fast")

I know now more fully than ever that there is no prayer without fasting, be the latter ever so little. And this fasting relates not merely to the palate, but all the senses and organs. Complete absorption in prayer must mean complete exclusion of physical activities till prayer possesses the whole of our being and we rise superior to, and are completely detached from, all physical functions. That state can only be reached after continual and voluntary crucifixion of the flesh. Thus all fasting, if it is a spiritual act, is an intense prayer or a preparation for it. It is a yearning of the soul to merge in the divine essence.

*Harijan, 8-7-'33, p. 4*

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(From "Wonderful If True")

The prayer is not vain repetition nor fasting mere starvation of the body. Prayer has to come from the heart which knows God by faith, and fasting in abstinence from evil or injurious thought, activity or food. Starvation of the body when the mind thinks of a multiplicity of dishes is worse than useless.

*Harijan, 10-4-1937, p. 68*

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(While appealing to people to fast and pray during the National Week, Gandhiji wrote:)

This is a hoary institution. A genuine fast cleanses body, mind and soul. It crucifies the flesh and to that extent sets the soul free. A sincere prayer can work wonders. It is an intense longing of the soul for its even greater purity. Purity thus gained when it is utilized for a noble purpose becomes a prayer. The mundane use of the *Gayatri*, its repetition for healing the sick, illustrates the meaning we have given to prayer. When the same *Gayatri Japa* is performed with a humble and concentrated mind in an intelligent manner in times of national difficulties and calamities, it becomes a most potent instrument for warding off danger. There can be no greater mistake than to suppose that the recitation of the *Gayatri*, the *namaz* or the Christian prayer are superstitions fit to be practised by the ignorant and the credulous. Fasting and prayer therefore

are a most powerful process of purification and that which purifies necessarily enables us the better to do our duty and to attain our goal. If therefore fasting and prayer seem at times not to answer, it is not because there is nothing in them but because the right spirit is not behind them.

A man who fasts and gambles away the whole of the day as do so many on *Janmashtami* day, naturally, not only obtains no result from the fast in the shape of greater purity but such a dissolute fast leaves him on the contrary degraded. A fast to be true must be accompanied by a readiness to receive pure thoughts and determination to resist all Satan's temptations. Similarly, a prayer to be true has to be intelligible and definite. One has to identify oneself with it. Counting beads with the name of Allah on one's lips, whilst the mind wanders in all directions, is worse than useless.

*Young India*, 24-3-1920, p. 1

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(From "Letter to V. S. Srinivasa Sastri")

Prayer expresses the soul's longing and fasting sets the soul free for efficacious prayer.

I would urge the modern generation not to regard fasting and prayer with scepticism or distrust. The greatest teachers of the world have derived extraordinary powers for the good of humanity and attained clarity of vision through fasting and prayer. Much of this discipline runs to waste because instead of being matter of the heart, it is often resorted to for stage effect.

*The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi—XVI*, (1965), p. 207

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(From "Prayer and Fasting")

It is my conviction and my experience that, if fasting and prayer are done with a sincere heart and in a religious spirit, marvelous results could be obtained from them. There is nothing as purifying as a fast, but fasting without prayer is barren; it may result in a diseased person being restored to health or may only mean a healthy person suffering unnecessarily. A fast undertaken purely for

ostentation or to inflict pain on others is an unmitigated sin. Hence, it is only a prayerful fast undertaken by way of penance to produce some effect on oneself which can be called a religious fast. Prayer does not mean begging God for worldly happiness or for the things which advance one's interests; it is the earnest cry of a soul in anguish. It cannot but influence the whole world and cannot but make itself heard in the divine court. When an individual or a nation suffers because of a great calamity, the true awareness of that suffering is prayer; in the presence of this purifying knowledge, physical functions like eating, etc., become less urgent. A mother suffers when her only son dies. She has no desire for eating. A nation is born when all feel the same sort of grief at the suffering of any one among them; such a nation deserves to be immortal. We are well aware that quite a large number of our brothers and sisters in India live in great suffering and so, truly speaking, we have occasion at every step for prayerful fasting. But our national life has not attained to this degree of intensity and purity. Even so, occasions arise when we suffer acutely.

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The peace and the good that ensue from turning our thoughts to God in a time of sorrow are not to be had in any other way.

[From Gujarati: *Navajivan*, 12-10-'19]

*Ibid.*, pp. 230, 231

## 61. THE TRUEST PRAYER

(From "Thinking Aloud")

Mortification of the flesh has been held all the world over as a condition of spiritual progress. There is no prayer without fasting, taking fasting in its widest sense. A complete fast is a complete and literal denial of self. It is the truest prayer. "Take my life and let it be, always only all for Thee" is not, should not be, a mere lip or figurative expression. It has to be a wreck less and joyous giving without the least reservation. Abstention from food and even water is but the mere beginning, the least part of the surrender.

Whilst I was putting together my thoughts for this article, a pamphlet written by Christians came into my hands wherein was a chapter on the necessity of example rather than precept. In this occurs a quotation from the 3rd chapter of Jonah. The prophet had foretold that Nineveh, the great city, was to be destroyed on the fortieth day of his entering it:

"So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sack-cloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them. For word came unto the King of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne and he laid his robe from him and covered him with a sack-cloth, and sat in ashes. And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and the nobles saying, 'Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; let them not feed, nor drink water. But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn everyone from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands. Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger that we perish not?' And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not."

Thus this was a "fast unto death". But every fast unto death is not suicide. This fast of the king and the people of Nineveh was a great and humble prayer to God for deliverance. It was to be either deliverance or death. This chapter from the book of Jonah reads like an incident in the Ramayana.

*Harijan, 15-4-'33, p. 4*

(From "Is It Loss of Faith?")

The Shastras tell us that when people in distress prayed to God for relief and He seemed to have hardened His heart, they declared a 'fast unto death' till God had listened to their prayer. Religious history tells us of those who survived their fast, because God listened to them, but it tells us nothing of those who silently and heroically perished in the attempt to win the answer from a deaf God. I am certain that many have died in that heroic manner, but without their faith in God and non-violence being in the slightest degree diminished. God does not always answer prayers in the manner we want Him to. For him life and death are one, and who is able to deny that all that is pure and good in the world persists because of the silent death of thousands unknown heroes and heroines!

*Harijan, 4-3-'33, p. 8*

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(From "Its Implications")

I believe that there is no prayer without fasting and there is no real fast without prayer.

*Harijan, 11-2-'33, p. 2*

## 62. THE INNER MEANING OF THE FAST

My religion says that only he who is prepared to suffer can pray to God. Fasting and prayer are common injunctions in my religion. But I know of this sort of penance even in Islam. In the life of the Prophet, I have read that the Prophet often fasted and prayed and forbade others to copy him. Someone asked him why he did not allow others to do the thing he himself was doing. 'Because I live on food divine', he said. He achieved most of his great things by fasting and prayer.

I learnt from him that only he can fast who has inexhaustible faith in God. The Prophet had revelations not in moments of ease and luxurious living. He fasted and prayed, kept awake for nights together and would be on his feet at all hours of the night as he received the revelations. Even at this moment, I see before me the picture of the Prophet thus fasting and praying. It is my own firm belief that the strength of the soul grows in proportion as you subdue the flesh.

*Young India*, 23-10-'24, p. 354

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Under certain circumstances it (fast) is the one weapon which God has given us for use in times of utter helplessness. We do not know its use or fancy that it begins and ends with mere deprivation of physical food. It is nothing of the kind. Absence of food is an indispensable but not the largest part of it. The largest part is prayer—communion with God. It more than adequately replaces physical food.

*Bapu's Letters to Mira [1924-1948]*, (1959), p. 251 P-9

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(From a letter to Devdas Gandhi)

It was only when in terms of human effort that I had exhausted all resources and realized my utter helplessness, that I laid my head in God's lap. That is the inner meaning and significance of my fast. You would do well to read and

ponder over *Gajendra Moksha* the greatest of devotional poems as I have called it. Then alone perhaps will you be able to appreciate the step I have taken.

*The End of an Epoch*, (1962), p. 25

### 63. GITA—THE MOTHER

The Gita is the universal Mother. She turns away nobody. Her door is wide open to anyone who knocks. A true votary of the Gita does not know what disappointment is. He ever dwells in perennial joy and peace that passeth understanding. But that peace and joy come not to the sceptic or to him who is proud of his intellect or learning. It is reserved only for the humble in spirit who brings to her worship a fullness of faith and an undivided singleness of mind. There never was a man who worshipped her in that spirit and went back disappointed.

Our students are prone to be upset by trifles. A trivial thing like failure in an examination plunges them into the darkest despair. The Gita inculcates upon them the duty of perseverance in the face of seeming failure. It teaches us that we have a right to actions only but not to the fruit thereof and that success and failure are one and the same thing at bottom. It calls upon us to dedicate ourselves, body, mind and soul, to pure duty, and not to become mental voluptuaries at the mercy of all chance desires and undisciplined impulses. As a Satyagrahi, I can declare that the Gita is ever presenting me with fresh lessons. If somebody tells me that this is my delusion, my reply to him would be that I shall hug this delusion as my richest treasure.

I would advise the students to begin their day with an early morning recitation of the Gita. I am a lover and devotee of Tulasidas. I adore the great spirit that gave to an aching world the all-healing *mantra* of Ramanama. But I am here today not to present Tulasidas to you, but to ask you to take up the study of the Gita, not in a carping or critical spirit, but in a devout and reverent spirit. Thus approached, she will grant your every wish. It is no joke, I admit, remembering by heart all the eighteen chapters, but it is worthwhile to make the attempt. Once you have tasted of its sweet nectar, your attachment to it will grow from day to day. The recitation of the Gita verses will support you in your trials and console you in your distress, even in the darkness of solitary confinement. And, if with these verses on your lips you receive the final

summons and deliver up your spirit, you will attain Brahma-Nirvan— the final Liberation. What that blessed state is—I leave it for your learned Acharyas to explain to you.

*Harijan, 24-8-'34, p. 222*

## 64. THE MEDITATION OF MOTHER GITA

JUNE 18, 1932

In a letter to Bhau Bapu gave detailed instructions about *dhyana* (meditation): 'There is nothing wrong if you draw a picture by your own imagination and meditate over it. But nothing like it if one could rest content with the meditation of Mother Gita. This can be done either by thinking of one's dead mother as the symbol of the Gita or by drawing a self-imagined mental picture. Mother cow for instance would serve the latter purpose. The second method is preferable if possible. We may meditate on any Gita verse or even one single word in it. Every word in the Gita is an ornament of hers, and to think of an ornament of our beloved object is as good as thinking of it itself. But someone could devise a third mode of meditation and should be free to practise his own device. Every brain works differently from every other brain. No two persons think of the same thing in the same way. There is bound to be some difference or other between their descriptions and imaginings.

As the sixth chapter assures us, the least little *sadhana* (spiritual effort) is not wasted. The seeker will proceed further in his next birth, starting from it as a base. Similarly if a person has the will but not the ability to make spiritual progress, his environment in his subsequent birth will be such as to strengthen that will. But this fact must not be made an excuse for relaxation now. If it is so made, it means that the will is only intellectual and not heart-felt. Intellectual willing serves no useful purpose, as it does not persist after death. If the will is heart-felt, it must manifest itself in effort. But it is quite possible that physical weakness as well as the environment may come in its way. Even so, when the soul leaves the body, it carries its goodwill with it, which fructifies into deed in the subsequent birth when circumstances are more favourable. Thus one who does good is sure to make steady progress.

'Jnaneshvar may have meditated on Nivritti during the latter's lifetime. But we must not follow his example. One on whom we meditate must be a perfect individual. To ascribe such perfection to a living person is improper and

unnecessary. Again it is possible that Jnaneshvar meditated on Nivrutti not as he actually was but as he had imagined him to be. Such refinement is not however for people like ourselves. When we raise the question of meditating on a living person, there is no room for a mental image of him. If the question is answered with such an image in view, it can only throw the questioner into mental confusion.

*The Diary of Mahadev Desai*, Vol. I, (1953), pp. 1 70-72

## 65. THE USE OF IMAGES IN PRAYER

I do not forbid the use of images in prayer. I only prefer the worship of the Formless. This preference is perhaps improper. One thing suits one man; another thing will suit another man, and no comparison can fairly be made between the two. You are not right about Shankara and Ramanuja. Spiritual experience has greater influence than environment. The seeker of truth should not be affected by his surroundings but rise above them. Views based on the environment are often found to be wrong. For instance take the case of body and soul. The soul being at present in close contact with the body, we cannot at once realize her as distinct from her physical venture. Therefore it was a very great man indeed who rose above his environment and said, "It (the soul) is not this (the body)." The language of saints like Tukaram should not be taken in a literal sense. I suggest that you read his- *abhang, kela maticha pashupati* etc. The moral is that we must realize the idea which underlies the words of holy men. It is quite possible that they worshipped the Formless even while they pictured God in a particular form. This is impossible for ordinary mortals like ourselves, and therefore we would be in a sorry plight if we did not penetrate a little deeper into the implications of their statements.

*The Diary of Mahadev Desai, Vol. 1, (1953), pp. 168-69*

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(From "Discourse XII")

Mortal man can only imagine the Unmanifest, the Impersonal, and as his language fails him he often negatively describes It as 'Neti', 'Neti' (Not That, Not That). And so even iconoclasts are at bottom no better than idol-worshippers. To worship a book, to go to a church, or to pray with one's face in a particular direction—all these are forms of worshipping the Formless in an image or idol. And yet both the idol-breaker and the idol-worshipper cannot lose sight of the fact that there is something which is beyond all form, Unthinkable, Formless, Impersonal, Changeless. The highest goal of the devotee is to become one with the object of his devotion. The *bhakta* extinguishes himself and merges into,

becomes, *Bhagavan*. This state can best be reached by devoting oneself to some form, and so it is said that the short cut to the Unmanifest is really the longest and the most difficult.

*The Gita According to Gandhi*, (1956), pp. 308-09

## 66. IDOL-WORSHIP

(From "Hinduism")

I do not disbelieve in idol-worship. An idol does not excite any feeling of veneration in me. But I think that idol-worship is part of human nature. We hanker after symbolism. Why should one be more composed in a church than elsewhere? Images are an aid to worship. ... I do not consider idol-worship a sin.

*Young India*, 6-10-'21, p. 318

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(From "More Animal than Human")

It is being more and more demonstrated that it is the worship of God, be it in the crudest manner possible, which distinguishes man from the brute. It is the possession of that additional quality which gives him such enormous hold upon God's creation. It is wholly irrelevant to show that millions of educated people never enter a church, mosque or temple. Such entry is neither natural nor indispensable for the worship of God. Those even who bow their heads before stocks and stones, who believe in incantations or ghosts, acknowledge a power above and beyond them. It is true that this form of worship is savage, very crude; nevertheless, it is worship of God. Gold is still gold though in its crudest state. It merely awaits refinement to be treated as gold even by the ignorant. No amount of refinement will turn iron ore into gold. Refined worship is doubtless due to the effort of man. Crude worship is as old as Adam, and, as natural to him as eating and drinking, if not more natural. A man may live without eating for days on end, he does not live without worship for a single minute. He may not acknowledge the fact as many an ignorant man may not acknowledge the possession of lungs or the fact of the circulation of blood.

*Young India*, 8-7-'26, p. 245

## 67. IDOLATRY

(From "Weekly Letter" by M. D.)

*Gandhiji*: "As for idol-worship, you cannot do without it in some form or other. Why does a Musalman give his life for defending a mosque which he calls a house of God? And why does a Christian go to a church, and when he is required to take an oath he swears by the Bible? Not that I see any objection to it. And what is it if not idolatry to give untold riches for building mosques and tombs? And what do the Roman Catholics do when they kneel before Virgin Mary and before saints – quite imaginary figures in stone or painted on canvas or glass?"

*Catholic Father*: "But, I keep my mother's photo and kiss it in veneration of her. But I do not worship it, nor do I worship saints. When I worship God, I acknowledge Him as creator and greater than any human being."

G.: "Even so, it is not the stone we worship, but it is God we worship in images of stone or metal, however crude they may be."

C.: "But villagers worship stones as God."

G.: "No, I tell you they do not worship anything that is less than God. When you kneel before Virgin Mary and ask for her intercession, what do you do? You ask to establish contact with God through her. Even so a Hindu seeks to establish contact with God through a stone image. I can understand your asking for the Virgin's intercession. Why are Musalmans filled with awe and exultation when they enter a mosque? Why is not the whole universe a mosque? And what about the magnificent canopy of heaven that spreads over you? Is it any less than a mosque? But I understand and sympathize with the Muslims. It is their way of approach to God. The Hindus have their own way of approach to the same Eternal Being. Our media of approach are different, but that does not make Him different."

C.: "But the Catholics believe that God revealed to them the true way."

G.: "But why do you say that the will of God is expressed only in one book called the Bible and not in others? Why do you circumscribe the power of God?"

C.: "But Jesus proved that he had received the word of God through miracles."

G.: "But that is Mohammed's claim too. If you accept Christian testimony you must accept Muslim testimony and Hindu testimony too."

C.: "But Mohammed said he could not do miracles."

G.: "No, He did not want to prove the existence of God by miracles. But he claimed to receive messages from God."

When one comes to think of it, how simple and naive is man's fanaticism! "The attempt to make the one religion which is their own dominate all time and space, comes naturally to men addicted to sectarianism," said Gurudeva Rabindranath Tagore at the Parliament of Religions in Calcutta. "This makes it offensive to them to be told that God is generous in His distribution of love, and His means of communication with men have not been restricted to a blind lane abruptly stopping at one narrow point of history. If humanity ever happens to be overwhelmed with the universal flood of a bigoted exclusiveness, then God will have to make provision for another Noah's ark to save His creatures from the catastrophe of spiritual desolation."

*Harijan*, 13-3-'37, p. 39

## 68. IDOLATRY v. IDOL-WORSHIP

(From "Question Box")

Q. I am a Hindu student. I have been great friends with a Muslim, but we have fallen out over the question of idol-worship. I find solace in idol-worship, but I cannot give an answer to my Muslim friend in terms of what may be called convincing. Will you say something in *Harija* ?

A. My sympathies are with you and your Muslim friend. I suggest your reading my writings on the question in *Young India* and, if you feel at all satisfied, let your Muslim friend read them too. If your friend has real love for you, he will conquer his prejudice against idol-worship. A friendship which exacts oneness of opinion and conduct is not worth much. Friends have to tolerate one another's ways of life and thought even though they may be different, except where the difference is fundamental. May be your friend has come to think that it is sinful to associate with you as you are an idolater. Idolatry is bad, not so idol-worship. An idolater makes a fetish of his idol. An idol-worshipper sees God even in a stone and therefore takes the help of an idol to establish his union with God. Every Hindu child knows that the stone in the famous temple in Banaras is not Kashi Vishwanath. But he believes that the Lord of the Universe does reside specially in that stone. This play of the imagination is permissible and healthy. Every edition of the Gita on a book-stall has not that sanctity which I ascribe to my own copy. Logic tells me there is no more sanctity in my own copy than in any other. The sanctity is in my imagination. But that imagination brings about marvelous concrete results. It changes men's lives. I am of opinion that, whether we admit it or not, we are all idol-worshippers or idolaters, if the distinction I have drawn is not allowed. A book, a building, a picture, a carving are surely all images in which God does reside, but they are not God. He who says they are, errs.

*Harijan*, 9-3-'40, p. 30

## 69. WORSHIP IN TEMPLES

(From "A Hotchpot of Questions")

Q. You seem to advocate the starting of temples for Panchamas as a step in the direction of their amelioration. Is it not a fact that the Hindu mind, confined for generations past within things like the 'temple' has generally lost the power of any larger vision |of God? When you seek to remove untouchability, when you seek to raise the 'untouchables' and accord them a place of freedom and dignity in society, need you do so by encouraging them to copy the present-day caste Hindus even in the matter of the latter's vices, sins and superstitions? In the course of ameliorating the 'untouchables' may we not also reform the Hindu community as a whole, so far at least as worship of temple gods is concerned? In the course of freeing the depressed classes from their present social disabilities, may we not seek also to free their mind and thought, and thus let social reforms bring into being a broader religious and intellectual outlook?

A. I do not regard the existence of temple as a sin or superstition. Some form of common worship, and a common place of worship appear to be a human necessity. Whether the temples should contain images or not is a matter of temperament and taste. I do not regard a Hindu or a Roman Catholic place of worship containing images as necessarily bad or .superstitious and a mosque or a Protestant place of worship being good or free of superstition merely because of their exclusion of images. A symbol such as a Cross or a book may easily become idolatrous, and therefore superstitious. And the worship of the image of child Krishna or Virgin Mary may become ennobling and free of all superstition. It depends upon the attitude of the heart of the worshipper.

*Young India*, 5-11-'25, p. 378

## 70. ARE TEMPLES NECESSARY?

An American correspondent writes:

"My reading of the history of religion is that every great religious advance has been away from organized and formal religion. The great religious truths which the prophets of religion have apprehended and proclaimed have always been lost when their disciples have tried to localize them in priestcraft and temples. Truth is too universal to be confined and made sectarian. Therefore, I consider temples, mosques and churches to be a prostitution of religion. In every nation we have witnessed the degradation of truth and righteousness in the temples; and, in my opinion, in the very conception of organized religion this is certain to follow as a natural consequence. When religion is made a monopoly by the priesthood and temples become vested interests, the great mass of mankind becomes isolated from truth until some new prophets arise who break the bonds of orthodoxy and release the spirits of men from dependence upon the priests and temples.

"Buddha and Jesus, Chaitanya and Kabir realized and taught Truth, which is universal in its character and helpful to all men everywhere, but the isms which bear their names are exclusive and divisive and, therefore, harmful to those who accept the priestly interpretations of these teachings. Religion loses its human character and deserves its reputation of being called an 'opiate'.

"Therefore, I can see no advantage in gaining permission for the Harijan to enter the temples. I know that justice demands that they shall have the liberty even to do wrong. But if they are to learn the lessons of self-respect which will enable them to take an equal place with caste people in the development of the future of our civilization, I think they must learn an independence of all priests and temples. They must attain a self-realization, which is dependent upon inner rather than outer forces. In the process there is likely to be some extravagance of defiance and bitterness before they actually find themselves. When you spoke in Europe that 'you formerly considered that God is Truth but now you realized that Truth is God,' you struck a responsive chord in the hearts of all of us, whatever our traditions may have been. But when you become a defender of the faith of temple Hinduism, even though it be a purified type, we feel that you have lost your universal appeal, an appeal which I consider you to have made as

a Hindu, but as one of that large body of spiritual-minded Hindus who do not look to the temples for the spiritual sustenance of their lives. I do not believe that such men are outside the best traditions of Hinduism but are rather in the line of the creators of the religious spirit which has made the spirituality of India her greatest contribution to humanity.

"Nor do I believe that this higher Hinduism is too high for the Harijans, whose spiritual intuitions have never been dulled by our modern type of education. Buddha, Chaitanya and Kabir all made a large appeal to this class, and the teachings of Jesus were most appreciated, not by the high and mighty, but by publicans and fishermen, who were outside the pale of respectable society. If you were to challenge the untouchables to keep as before outside the temples and refuse to accept an inferior status in society, by defying the caste leaders, and encourage them to develop their inner resources, I think you would have the support of just as large a community of Hindus as you have in your present programme."

This considered opinion representing a large body of people throughout the world deserves respectful consideration. Such an opinion, however, does not appear before me for the first time. I have had the privilege and opportunity of discussing this subject with many friends in the light it is presented. I can appreciate much of the argument, but I venture to think that it is inconclusive, because it has omitted material facts. Some priests are bad. Temples, churches and mosques very often show corruption, more often deterioration. Nevertheless, it would be impossible to prove that all priests are bad or have been bad and that all churches, temples and mosques are hot-beds of corruption and superstition. Nor does the argument take note of this fundamental fact that no faith has done without a habitation; and I go further that in the very nature of things it cannot exist, so long as man remains as he is constituted. His very body has been rightly called ^the temple of the Holy Ghost, though innumerable such temples belie the fact and are hot-beds of corruption used for dissoluteness. And I presume that it will be accepted as a conclusive answer to a sweeping suggestion that all bodies should be destroyed for the corruption of many, if it can be shown, as it can be, that there are some bodies which are proper temples of the Holy Ghost. The cause for the corrup-

tion of many bodies will have to be sought elsewhere. Temples of stone and mortar are nothing else than a natural extension of these human temples and though they were in their conception undoubtedly habitations of God like human temples, they have been subject to the same law of decay as the latter. I know of no religion or sect that has done or is doing without its house of God, variously described as a temple, mosque, church, synagogue or *agiari*. Nor is it certain that any of the great reformers including Jesus destroyed or discarded temples altogether. All of them sought to banish corruption from temples as well as from society. Some of them, if not all, appeared to have preached from temples. I have ceased to visit temples for years, but I do not regard myself on that account as a better person than before. My mother never missed going to the temple, when she was in a fit state to go there. Probably her faith was far greater than mine, though I do not visit temples. There are millions whose faith is sustained through these temples, churches and mosques. They are not all blind followers of a superstition, nor are they fanatics. Superstition and fanaticism are not their monopoly. These vices have their root in our hearts and minds.

My advocacy of temple-entry I hold to be perfectly consistent with the declaration which I often made in Europe that Truth is God. It is that belief which makes it possible, at the risk of losing friendships, popularity and prestige, to advocate temple entry for Harijans. The Truth that I know or I feel I know demands that advocacy from me. Hinduism loses its right to make a universal appeal if it closes its temples to the Harijans.

That temples and temple worship are in need of radical reform must be admitted. But all reform without temple-entry will be to tamper with the disease. I am aware that the American friend's objection is not based upon the corruption or impurity of the temples. His objection is much more radical. He does not believe in them at all. I have endeavoured to show that his position is untenable in the light of facts which can be verified from everyday experience. To reject the necessity of temples is to reject the necessity of God, religion and earthly existence.

*Harijan*, 11-3-'33, p. 4

## 71. ARE PLACES OF WORSHIP A SUPERSTITION?

(Originally appeared under the title "Literalism")

A correspondent writes thus passionately:

"I am afraid, there is a little fly in the ointment of your splendid defence (in *Young India* of September 23rd)\* of the practice of Divine prayer, especially congregational prayer. At the end of the article, referring to churches, temples and mosques you say, 'these places of worship are not a mere idle superstition to be swept away at the first opportunity. They have survived all attacks up to now and are likely to persist to the end of time.'

"On reading this I asked myself: Attacks by whom? Surely those attacks were not made by atheists or scoffers or humbugs, to anything like the extent to which the opposing sects of God-believers are known to have attacked the places of worship of one another. In fact, most, if not all, of the attacks you speak of were perpetrated by 'godly' zealots *in the name and for the glory of each one's own God*. It would be insulting your knowledge of world history to cite instances.

"Secondly, I asked myself: Is it true—is it strictly correct to say, that these places of worship have survived all attacks? Again the answer is: Surely not. Witness the site at Kashi (or Banaras) where had stood the temple of Vishwanath for long centuries, since even before Lord Buddha's time — but where now stands dominating the 'Holy City' a mosque built out of the ruins of the desecrated old temple by orders of no less a man than the, 'Living Saint' (*ginda Pir*), the 'Ascetic King' (*Sultan Auliva*), the 'Puritan Emperor'—Aurangazeb. Again, it is not the 'unbelieving' British, but the terrible believer, Ibn Saud, and his Wahabi hosts, that are responsible for the recent demolition and desecration of many places of worship in the Hedjaz (Muslim's 'Holy Land'), over which Musalman Indians are just now so loudly lamenting, and which the Nizam of Hyderabad—alone of all Muslim rulers in the world—has vainly tried to restore with his money.

"Do these facts mean nothing to you, Mahatmaji?"

These facts do mean a great deal to me. They show undoubtedly man's barbarity. But they chasten me. They warn me against becoming intolerant. And they make me tolerant even towards the intolerant. They show man's utter insignificance and thus drive him to pray, if he will not be led to it. For does

not history record instances of humbled pride bending the knee before the Almighty, washing His feet with tears of blood and asking to be reduced to dust under His heels? Verily 'the letter killeth, the spirit giveth life'.

The writer who is one of the most regular and painstaking readers of *Young India* should know by this time that places of worship to me are not merely brick and mortar. They are but a shadow of the Reality. Against every church and every mosque and every temple destroyed, hundreds have risen in their places. It is wholly irrelevant to the argument about the necessity of prayer that the so-called believers have belied their belief and that many places renowned for their sacred character have been razed to the ground. I hold it to be enough, and it is enough for my argument, if I can prove that there have been men in the world and there are men today in existence, for whom prayer is positively the bread of life. I recommend to the correspondent the practice of going unobserved to mosques, temples and churches, without any preconceived ideas, and he will discover as I have discovered that there is something in them which appeals to the heart and which transforms those who go there, not for show, not out of shame or fear, but out of simple devotion. It defies analysis. Nevertheless the fact stands that pure-minded people going to the present places of pilgrimage which have become hot-beds of error, superstition, and even immorality, return from them purer for the act of worship. Hence the significant assurance in the Bhagavadgita: 'I make return according to the spirit in which men worship Me'.

What the correspondent has written undoubtedly shows our present limitations which we must try as early as possible to get rid of. It is a plea for purification of religions, broadening of the outlook. That much-needed reform is surely coming. There is a better world consciousness, and may I say that even the reform we all hanker after needs intense prayer in order to achieve deeper purification of self? For without deeper purification of mankind in general, mutual toleration and mutual good-will are not possible.

*Young India*, 4-11-'26, p. 386

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<sup>1</sup> Vide Chapter 19: "No Faith in Prayer!", p. 337.

## 72. WHY NO TEMPLE IN THE ASHRAM?

(From "Letter to Narayan M. Khare")

You did well in writing to me regarding the temple. If you have still something more to say, write to me. I surely don't insist that my view in this matter should prevail. However, my views on this subject are fixed. I have said regarding myself that I am both an image-worshipper and an image-breaker. The God conceived by a human being is bound to be a form, though the image may be only in the mind. In that sense, I am an image-worshipper. But I have never been willing to worship any form or image as God. Towards a form or image, I always feel *neti, neti*. Hence I regard myself as image-breaker. This being my attitude, I have always felt that we should not have any temple in the Ashram. And it was for this reason that we decided to have no building even for prayers. We sit in the open, with the sky above as the roof and the horizons in the four sides as the walls. If we wish to maintain an attitude of equality towards all religions, this is how we should live. These days, I am trying to read a little from the Vedas and other sacred books. I see this same thing in them all. There is no mention of image-worship anywhere. But Hinduism has a place for it. We should not, therefore, oppose it. However, image-worship is not obligatory. It is voluntary. I feel, therefore, that it would be better if, as an institution, we kept away from image-worship. If what I have always believed to be a *samadhi* is really a temple, we should not make it a place of public worship. When the owner of the land wished to demolish the structure and carry away the bricks, I paid money to him against the estimated value of the bricks and saved the structure. But I do not wish to turn it into a temple.

*The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi—LI, (1972), p. 10*

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(From "Letter to Nirmala H. Desai")

Yes, worship of a photograph also is image-worship. However, there is certainly a difference between meditating on a photograph, on special days and building a temple and installing an image in it. We should not introduce image-worship in the Ashram. The Ashram should have place equally for all religions.

*Ibid.*, p. 89

### 73. A MODEL TEMPLE

I mentioned only the other day an ambitious scheme set on foot for a model temple in Rajkot. Several correspondents have taken me to task for advocating temple-entry for Harijans without emphasizing the necessity of temple reform. There is no doubt that temple reform is necessary. But here, again, there is need for caution. Some of them think that it is possible to replace all the existing temples with new ones. I do not share that view. All temples will never be alike. They will always vary, as they have done in the past, with the varying human needs. What a reformer should be concerned with is a radical change more in the inward spirit than in the outward form. If the first is changed, the second will take care of itself. If the first remains unchanged, the second, no matter how radically changed, will be like a whited sepulchre. A mausoleum, however beautiful, is a tomb and not a mosque, and a bare plot of consecrated ground may be a real temple of God.

Therefore the first desideratum is the priest. My ideal priest must be a man of God. He must be a true servant of the people. He should have the qualifications of a guide, friend and philosopher to those among whom he is officiating. He must be a whole-timer with the least possible needs and personal ties. He should be versed in the Shastras. His whole concern will be to look after the welfare of his people. I have not drawn a fanciful picture. It is almost true to life. It is based on the recollections of my childhood. The priest I am recalling was looked up to by the prince and the people. They flocked round him for advice and guidance in the time of their need.

If the sceptics say such a priest is hard to find nowadays, he would be partly right. But I would ask the reformer to wait for building the temple of his ideal till he finds his priest.

Meanwhile let him cultivate in himself the virtues he will have in the priest of his imagination. Let him expect these from the priests of existing temples. In other words, by his gentle and correct conduct, let him infect his immediate surroundings with the need of the times and let him have faith that his thought,

surcharged with his own correct conduct, will act more powerfully than the mightiest dynamo. Let him not be impatient to see the result in a day. A thought may take years of conduct to evolve the requisite power. What are years or generations in the life of a great reformer?

Now, perhaps, the reader will follow my view of a model temple. I can present him with no architect's plan and specification. Time is not ripe for it. But that does not baffle the reformer. He can choose the site for his future temple. It must be as extensive as he can get it. It need not be in the heart of a village or a city. It should be easily accessible to the Harijans and the other poor and yet it must not be in insanitary surroundings. If possible, it should be higher than its surroundings. In any case, I would aim at making the plinth of the actual temple as high as possible. And on this site I should select my plot for daily worship.

Round this will come into being a school, a dispensary, a library, secular and religious. The school may serve also as a meeting or debating hall. I should have a *dharmashala* or guest-house connected with the temple. Each one of these will be a separate institution and yet subordinate to the temple and may be built simultaneously or one after another as circumstances and funds may permit. The buildings may or may not be substantial. If labour is voluntary, as it well may be, with mud and straw a beginning may be made at once.

But the temple is not yet built. The foundation was laid when the site was procured, the plot for the temple was selected and the first prayer was offered. For the Bhagavat says, "Wherever people meet and utter His name from their hearts, there God dwells, there is His temple." The building, the deity, the consecration is the province of the priest. When he is found, he will set about his task, but the temple began its existence from the time of the first prayer. And if it was the prayer of true men and women, its continuous progress was assured.

So much for the temple of the future. The reader who cares to study the Rajkot scheme will find that the outward form of my model temple materially corresponds to that in the scheme. Indeed, there is nothing new in my idea or the

Rajkot scheme. The village temples of yore had almost all the adjuncts suggested by me.

But we must deal with the existing temples. They can become real Houses of God today, if the worshippers will insist on the priests conforming to the ideal presented by me.

*Harijan, 29-4-33, p. 6*

## 74. NATURE'S TEMPLE OF WORSHIP

(Originally appeared under the title "God's Temples")

Here in Ceylon where I am writing for *Young India* amid surroundings where nature has bountifully poured her richest treasures, I recall a letter written by a poetically inclined friend from similar scenes. I share with the reader a paragraph from that letter:

"A lovely morning! Cool cloudy, with a drowsy sun whose rays are soft as velvet. It is a strangely quiet morning –there is a hush upon it, as of prayer. And the mists are like incense, and the trees worshippers in a trance, and the birds and insects pilgrims come to chant *bhajans*. Oh! how I wish one could learn true abandonment from Nature! We seem to have forgotten our birth-right to worship where and when and how we please. We build temples and mosques and churches to keep our worship safe from prying eyes and away from outside influences, but we forget that walls have eyes and ears, and the roofs might be sv/arming with ghosts—who knows!

"Good Gracious, I shall find myself preaching next! How foolish, on a lovely morning like this? A little child in the garden adjoining is singing as unconsciously and joyously as a bird. I feel inclined to go and take the dust of its little feet. And since I cannot pour out my heart in sound as simply as that little one, my only refuge is in silence!"

Churches, mosques and temples, which cover so much hypocrisy and humbug and shut the poorest out of them, seem but a mockery of God and His worship, when one sees the eternally renewed temple of worship under the vast blue canopy inviting every one of us to real worship, instead of abusing His name by quarrelling in the name of religion.

*Young India*, 8-12-'27, p. 414

## 75. TREE WORSHIP

(Translated from *Hindi Navajivan* by Pyarelal)

A correspondent writes:

"It is a common enough sight in this country to see men and women offering worship to stocks and stones and trees, but I was surprised to find, that even educated women belonging to the families of enthusiastic social workers were not above this practice. Some of these sisters and friends defend the practice by saying, that since it is founded on pure reverence for the divine in nature and no false beliefs, it cannot be classed as superstition, and they cite the names of Satyavan and Savitri whose memory, they say, they commemorate in that way. The argument does not convince me. May I request you to throw some light on the matter?"

I like this question. It raises the old, old question of image-worship. I am both a supporter and opponent of image-worship. When image-worship degenerates into idolatry and becomes encrusted with false beliefs and doctrines, it becomes a necessity to combat it as a gross social evil. On the other hand image-worship in the sense of investing one's ideal with a concrete shape is inherent in man's nature, and even valuable as an aid to devotion.

Thus we worship an image when we offer homage to a book which we regard as holy or sacred. We worship an image when we visit a temple or a mosque with a feeling of sanctity or reverence. Nor do I see any harm in all this. On the contrary endowed as man is with a finite, limited understanding, he can hardly do otherwise.

Even so far from seeing anything inherently evil or harmful in tree worship, I find in it a thing instinct with a deep pathos and poetic beauty. It symbolizes true reverence for the entire vegetable kingdom, which with its endless panorama of beautiful shapes and forms, declares to us as it were with a million tongues the greatness and glory of God. Without vegetation our planet would not be able to support life even for a moment. In such a country

especially, therefore, in which there is a scarcity of trees, tree worship assumes a profound economic significance.

I, therefore, see no necessity for leading a crusade against tree worship. It is true, that the poor simple-minded women who offer worship to trees have no reasoned understanding of the implications of their act. Possibly they would not be able to give any explanation as to why they perform it. They act in the purity and utter simplicity of their faith. Such faith is not a thing to be despised; it is a great and powerful force that we should treasure.

Far different, however, is the case of vows and prayers which votaries offer before trees. The offering of vows and prayers for selfish ends, whether offered in churches, mosques, temples or before trees and shrines, is a thing not to be encouraged. Making of selfish requests or offering of vows is not related to image-worship as effect and cause. A personal selfish prayer is bad whether made before an image or an unseen God.

Let no one, however, from this understand me to mean, that I advocate tree worship in general. I do not defend tree worship because I consider it to be a necessary aid to devotion, but only because I recognize, that God manifests Himself in innumerable forms in this universe, and every such manifestation commands my spontaneous reverence.

*Young India*, 26-9-'29, p. 320

## 76. ATMOSPHERE FOR PRAYERS

My prayers here (first-class on a ship) lack the depth, the serenity and concentration they had when I was in gaol.

I am not writing all this in a frivolous mood, but after deep reflection. I think of these things every day. ... I have realized that those who wish to serve God cannot afford to pamper themselves or to run after luxury. Prayers do not come easily in an atmosphere of luxuries. Even if we do not ourselves share the luxuries, we cannot escape their natural influence. The energy that we spend in resisting that influence is at the cost of our devotional efforts.

[From Gujarati: *Indian Opinion*, 7-8-1909]

*The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*—IX, (1963), pp. 276-77

## 77. THE PLACE OF PRAYER IN ASHRAM LIFE

(Translated into English from Gujarati by V. G. Desai)

I

If insistence on truth constitutes the root of the Ashram, prayer is the principal feeder of that root. The social (as distinguished from the individual) activities of the Ashram commence everyday with the congregational morning worship at 4-15 to 4-45 a.m. and close with the evening prayer at 7 to 7-30 p.m. Ever since the Ashram was founded, not a single day has passed to my knowledge without this worship. I know of several occasions when owing to the rains only one responsible person was present on the prayer ground.

All inmates are expected to attend the worship except in the case of illness or similar compelling reason for absence. This expectation has been fairly well fulfilled at the evening prayer, but not in the morning.

The time for morning worship was as a matter of experiment fixed at 4, 5, 6 and 7 a. m., one after another. But on account of my persistently strong attitude on the subject, it has been fixed at last at 4-20 a.m. With the first bell at 4 everyone rises from bed and after a wash reaches the prayer ground by 4-20.

I believe that in a country like India the sooner a man rises from bed the better. Indeed millions must necessarily rise early. If the peasant is a late riser, his crops will suffer damage. Cattle are attended to and cows are milked early in the morning. Such being the case, seekers of saving truth, servants of the people or monks may well be up at 2 or 3; it would be surprising if they are not. In all countries of the world devotees of God and tillers of the soil rise early. Devotees take the name of God and peasants work in their fields serving the world as well as themselves. To my mind both are worshippers. Devotees are deliberately such while cultivators by their industry worship God unawares, as it helps to sustain the world. If instead of working in the fields, they took to

religious meditation, they would be failing in their duty and involving themselves and the world in ruin.

We may or may not look upon the cultivator as a devotee, but where peasants, labourers and other people have willy-nilly to rise early, how can a worshipper of Truth or servant of the people be a late riser? Again in the Ashram we are trying to co-ordinate work and worship. Therefore I am definitely of opinion that all able-bodied people in the Ashram must rise early even at the cost of inconvenience. 4 a.m. is not early but the latest time when we must be up and doing.

Then again we have to take a decision on certain questions. • Where should the prayers be offered? Should we erect a temple or meet in the open air? Then again, should we raise a platform or sit in the sands or the dust? Should there be any images? At last we decided to sit on the sands under the canopy of the sky and not to install any image. Poverty is an Ashram observance. The Ashram exists in order to serve the starving millions. The poor have a place in it no less than others. It receives with open arms all who are willing to keep the rules. In such an institution, the house of worship cannot be built with bricks and mortar, the sky must suffice for roof and the quarters for walls and pillars. A platform was planned but discarded later on, as its size would depend upon the indeterminate number of worshippers. And a big one would cost a large sum of money. Experience has shown the soundness of the decision not to build a house or even a platform. People from outside also attend the Ashram prayers, so that at times the multitude present cannot be accommodated on the biggest of platforms.

Again as the Ashram prayers are being increasingly imitated elsewhere, the sky-roofed temple has proved its utility. Morning and evening prayers are held wherever I go. Then there is such large attendance, especially in the evening, that prayers are possible only on open grounds. And if I had been in the habit of worshipping in a prayer-hall only, I might perhaps never have thought of public prayers during my tours.

Then again all religions are accorded equal respect in the Ashram. Followers of all faiths are welcome there; they may or may not believe in the worship of images. No image is kept at the congregational worship of the Ashram in order to avoid hurting anybody's feelings. But if an Ashramite wishes to keep an image in his room he is free to do so.

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## II

At the morning prayer we first recite the *shlokas* (verses) printed in *Ashram BhajanaVali* (hymnal), and then sing one *bhajan* (hymn) followed by Ramadhun (repetition of Ramanama) and Gitapath (recitation of the Gita). In the evening we have recitation of the last 19 verses of the second chapter of the Gita, one *bhajan* and Ramadhun and then read some portion of a sacred book.

The *shlokas* were selected by Shri Kaka Kalelkar who has been in the Ashram since its foundation. Shri Maganlal Gandhi met him in Santiniketan, when he and the children of the Phoenix Settlement went there from South Africa while I was still in England. Dinabandhu Andrews and the late Mr. Pearson were then in Santiniketan. I had advised Maganlal to stay at some place selected by Andrews. And Andrews selected Santiniketan for the party. Kaka was a teacher there and came into close contact with Maganlal. Maganlal had been feeling the want of a Sanskrit teacher which was supplied by Kaka. Chintamani Shastri assisted him in the work. Kaka taught the children how to recite the verses repeated in prayer. Some of these verses were omitted in the Ashram prayer in order to save time. Such is the history of the verses recited at the morning prayer all these days.

The recitation of these verses has often been objected to on the ground of saving time or because it appeared to some people that they could not well be recited by a worshipper of truth or by a non-Hindu. There is no doubt that these verses are recited only in Hindu society, but I cannot see why a non-Hindu may not join in or be present at the recitation. Muslim and Christian friends who have heard the verses have not raised any objection. Indeed they need not cause annoyance to anyone who respects other faiths as much as he

respects his own. They do not contain any reflection on other people. Hindu being in an overwhelming majority in the Ashram, the verses must be selected from the sacred books of the Hindus. Not that nothing is sung or recited from non-Hindu scriptures. Indeed there were occasions on which Imamsaheb recited verses from the Koran.<sup>1</sup> Muslim and Christian hymns are often sung.

But the verses were strongly attacked from the standpoint of truth. An Ashramite modestly but firmly argued that the worship of Sarasvati, Ganesh and the like was violence done to truth; for no such divinities really existed as Sarasvati seated on a lotus with a *vina* (kind of musical instrument) in her hands, or as Ganesh with a big belly and an elephant's trunk. To this argument I replied as follows:

"I claim to be a votary of truth, and yet I do not mind reciting these verses or teaching them to the children. If we condemn some *shlokas* on the strength of this argument, it would be tantamount to an attack on the very basis of Hinduism. Not that we may not condemn anything in Hinduism which is fit for condemnation, no matter how ancient it is. But I do not believe that this is a weak or vulnerable point of Hinduism. On the other hand I hold that it is perhaps characteristic of our faith. Sarasvati and Ganesh are not independent entities. They are all descriptive names of one God. Devoted poets have given a local habitation and a name to His countless attributes. They have done nothing wrong. Such verses deceive neither the worshippers nor others. When a human being praises God he imagines Him to be such as he thinks fit. The God of his imagination is there for him. Even when we pray to a God devoid of form and attributes, we do in fact endow Him with attributes. And attributes too are form. Fundamentally God is indescribable in words. We mortals must of necessity depend upon the imagination which makes and sometimes mars us too. The qualities we attribute to God with the purest of motives are true for us but fundamentally false, because all attempts at describing Him must be unsuccessful. I am intellectually conscious of this and still I cannot help dwelling upon the attributes of God. My intellect can exercise no influence over my heart. I am prepared to admit that my heart in its weakness hankers after a

God with attributes. The *shlokas* which I have been reciting every day for the last fifteen years give me peace and hold good for me. In them I find beauty as well as poetry. Learned men tell many stories about Sarasvati, Ganesh and the like, which have their own use. I do not know their deeper meaning, as I have not gone into it, finding it unnecessary for me. It may be that my ignorance is my salvation. I did not see that I needed to go deep into this as a part of my quest of truth. It is enough that I know my God, and although I have still to realize His living presence, I am on the right path to my destination."

I could hardly expect that the objectors should be satisfied with this reply. An *ad hoc* committee examined the whole question fully and finally recommended that the *shlokas* should remain as they were, for every possible selection would be viewed with disfavour by someone or other.

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### III

A hymn was sung after the *shlokas*. Indeed singing hymns was the only item of the prayers in South Africa. The *shlokas* were added in India. Maganlal Gandhi was our leader in song. But we felt that the arrangement was unsatisfactory. We should have an expert singer for the purpose, and that singer should be one who would observe the Ashram rules. One such was found in Narayan Moreshvar Khare, a pupil of Pandit Vishnu Digambar, whom the master kindly sent to the Ashram. Pandit Khare gave us full satisfaction and is now a full member of the Ashram. He made hymn-singing interesting, and the *Ashram Bhajanavali* (hymnal) which is now read by thousands was in the main compiled by him. He introduced Ramadhun, the third item of our prayers.

The fourth item is recitation of verses from the Gita. The Gita has for years been an authoritative guide to belief and conduct for the Satyagraha Ashram. It has provided us with a test with which to determine the correctness or otherwise of ideas and courses of conduct in question. Therefore we wished that all Ashramites should understand the meaning of the Gita and if possible commit it to memory. If this last was not possible, we wished that they should at least read the original Sanskrit with correct pronunciation. With this end in

view we began to recite part of the Gita every day. We would recite a few verses everyday and continue the recitation until we had learnt them by heart. From this we proceeded to the *parayan*. And the recitation is now so arranged that the whole of the Gita is finished in fourteen days, and everybody knows what verses will be recited on any particular day. The first chapter is recited on every alternate Friday, and we shall come to it on Friday next (June 10, 1932). The seventh and eighth, the twelfth and thirteenth, the fourteenth and fifteenth, and the sixteenth and seventeenth chapters are recited on the same day in order to finish 18 chapters in 14 days.<sup>2</sup>

At the evening prayer we recite the last 19 verses of the second chapter of the Gita as well as sing a hymn and repeat Ramanama. These verses describe the characteristics of the *sthitaprajna* (the man of stable understanding), which a Satyagrahi too must acquire, and are recited in order that he may constantly bear them in mind.

Repeating the same thing at prayer from day to day is objected to on the ground that it thus becomes mechanical and tends to be ineffective. It is true that the prayer becomes mechanical. We ourselves are machines, and if we believe God to be our mover, we must behave like machines in His hands. If the sun and other heavenly bodies did not work like machines, the universe would come to a standstill. But in behaving like machines, we must not behave like inert matter. We are intelligent beings and must observe rules as such.

The point is not whether the contents of the prayer are always the same or differ from day to day. Even if they are full of variety, it is possible that they will become ineffective. The Gayatri verse among Hindus, the confession of faith (*kalma*) among Mussalmans, the typical Christian prayer in the Sermon on the Mount have been recited by millions for centuries everyday; and yet their power has not diminished but is ever on the increase. It all depends upon the spirit behind the recitation. If an unbeliever or a parrot repeats these potent words, they will fall quite flat. On the other hand when a believer utters them always, their influence grows from day to day.

Our staple food is the same. The wheat-eater will take other things besides wheat, and these additional things may differ from time to time, but the wheat bread will always be there on the dining table. It is the eater's staff of life, and he will never weary of it. If he conceives a dislike for it, that is a sign of the approaching dissolution of his body.

The same is the case with prayer. Its principal contents must be always the same. If the soul hungers after them, she will not quarrel with the monotony of the prayer but will derive nourishment from it. She will have a sense of deprivation on the day that it has not been possible to offer prayer. She will be more downcast than one who observes a physical fast. Giving up food may now and then be beneficial for the body; indigestion of prayer for the soul is something never heard of.

The fact is that many of us offer prayer without our soul being hungry for it. It is a fashion to believe that there is a soul; so we believe that she exists. Such is the sorry plight of many among us. Some are intellectually convinced that there is a soul, but they have not grasped that truth with the heart; therefore they do not feel the need for prayer. Many offer prayer because they live in society and think they must participate in its activities. No wonder they hanker after variety. As a matter of fact however they do not *attend* prayer. They want to enjoy the music or are merely curious or wish to listen to the sermon. They are not there to be one with God.

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#### IV

*Prarthana* (Gujarati word for prayer) literally means to ask for something, that is, to ask God for something in a spirit of humility. Here it is not used in that sense, but in the sense of praising or worshipping God, meditation and self-purification.

But who is God? God is not some person outside ourselves or away from the universe. He pervades everything, and is omniscient as well as omnipotent. He does not need any praise or petitions. Being immanent in all beings, He hears everything and reads our innermost thoughts. He abides in our hearts and is

nearer to us than the nails are to the fingers. What is the use of telling Him anything?

It is in view of this difficulty that *prarthana* is further paraphrased as self-purification. When we speak out aloud at prayer time, our speech is addressed not to God but to ourselves, and is intended to shake off our torpor. Some of us are intellectually aware of God, while others are afflicted by doubt. None has seen Him face to face. We desire to recognize and realize Him, to become one with Him, and seek to gratify that desire through prayer.

This God whom we seek to realize is Truth. Or to put it in another way Truth is God. This Truth is not merely the truth we are expected to speak. It is That which alone is, which constitutes the stuff of which all things are made, which subsists by virtue of its own power, which is not supported by anything else but supports everything that exists. Truth alone is eternal, everything else is momentary. It need not assume shape or form. It is pure intelligence as well as pure bliss. We call it Ishvara because everything is regulated by Its will. It and the law it promulgates are one. Therefore it is not a blind law. It governs the entire universe.

To propitiate this Truth is *prarthana* which in effect means an earnest desire to be filled with the spirit of Truth. This desire should be present all the twenty-four hours. But our souls are too dull to have this awareness day and night. Therefore we offer prayers for a short time in the hope that a time will come when all our conduct will be one continuously sustained prayer.

Such is the ideal of prayer for the Ashram, which at present is far, far away from it. The detailed programme outlined above is something external, but the idea is to make our very hearts prayerful. If the Ashram prayers are not still attractive, if even the inmates of the Ashram attend them under compulsion of a sort, it only means that none of us is still a man of prayer in the real sense of the term.

In heartfelt prayer the worshipper's attention is concentrated on the object of worship so much so that he is not conscious of anything else besides. The worshipper has well been compared to a lover. The lover forgets the whole

world and even himself in the presence of the beloved. The identification of the worshipper with God should be closer still. It comes only after much striving, self-suffering (*tapas*) and self-discipline. In a place which such a worshipper sanctifies by his presence, no inducements need be offered to people for attending prayers, as they are drawn to the house of prayer by the force of his devotion.

We have dealt so far with congregational prayer, but great stress is also laid in the Ashram on individual and solitary prayer. One who never prays by himself may attend congregational prayers but will not derive much advantage from them. They are absolutely necessary for a congregation, but as a congregation is made up of individuals, they are fruitless without individual prayers. Every member of the Ashram is therefore reminded now and then that he should of his own accord give himself up to self-introspection at all times of the day. No watch can be kept that he does this, and no account can be maintained of such silent prayer. I cannot say how far it prevails in the Ashram, but I believe that some are making more or less effort in that direction.

*Ashram Observances in Action*, (1959), Chap. II

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1 Recitation of short passages from the Koran has since been made an integral part of the Ashram prayer.—V. G. D.

2 Later on the Gita recitation was finished every seven instead of every fourteen days, and the chapters were distributed among the days as follows: Friday, 1 and 2; Saturday, 3, 4 and 5; Sunday, 6, 7 and 8; Monday, 9, 10, 11 and 12; Tuesday, 13, 14 and 15; Wednesday, 16 and 17; Thursday, 18. —V. G. D.

## 78. THE ASHRAM PRAYER

(From *Harijansevak*)

### III

The Ashram prayer has become very popular. Its development has been spontaneous. The *Ashram Bhajanaivali* (Hymn Book) has gone into several editions and is increasingly in demand. The birth and growth of this prayer has not been artificial. There is a history attached to almost every *shloka* and every selected *bhajan*. The *Bhajanaivali* contains among others *bhajans* from Muslim Sufis and Fakirs, from Guru Nanak, and from the Christian hymnary. Every religion seems to have found a natural setting in the prayer book.

Chinese, Burmese, Jews, Ceylonese, Muslims, Parsis, Europeans and Americans have all lived in the Ashram from time to time. In the same way two Japanese Sadhus came to me in Maganwadi in 1935. One of them was with me till the other day when war broke out with Japan. He was an ideal inmate of our home in Seva-gram. He took part in every activity with zest. I never heard of his quarrelling with anyone. He was a silent worker. He learnt as much Hindi as he could. He was a strict observer of his vows. Every morning and evening he could be seen going round with his drum and heard chanting his *mantra*. The evening worship always commenced with his *mantra* नम्यो हो रेंगे क्यों which means "I bow to the Buddha, the giver of true religion". I shall never forget the quickness, the orderliness and utter detachment with which he prepared himself the day the police came without notice to take him away from the Ashram. He took leave of me after reciting his favourite *mantra* and left his drum with me. "You are leaving us, but your *mantra* will remain an integral part of our Ashram prayer," were the words that came spontaneously to my lips. Since then, in spite of his absence, our morning and evening worship has commenced with the *mantra*. For me it is a constant reminder of Sadhu Keshav's purity and single-eyed devotion. Indeed its efficacy lies in that sacred memory.

While Sadhu Keshav was still with us Bibi Raihana Tyabji also came to stay at Sevagram for a few days. I knew her to be a devout Muslim but was not aware, before the death of her illustrious father, of how well-versed she was in Koran Sharif. When that jewel of Gujarat, Tyabji Saheb, expired, no sound of weeping broke the awful silence in his room. The latter echoed with Bibi Raihana's sonorous recitation of verses from the Koran. Such as Abbas Tyabji Saheb cannot die. He is ever alive in the example of national service which he has left behind. Bibi Raihana is an accomplished singer with an ample repertory of *bhajans* of all kinds. She used to sing daily as well as recite beautiful verses from the Koran. I asked her to teach some verses to any of the inmates who could learn them, and she gladly did so. Like so many who come here she had become one of us. Raihana went away when her visit was over, but she has left a fragrant reminder of herself. The well-known 'al Fateha' has been included in the Ashram worship. The following is a translation of it:

"1. I take refuge in Allah

from Satan the accursed.

"2. Say: He is God, the one and only God,

the Eternal, Absolute,

He begetteth not nor is He begotten, And there is none like unto Him.

"3. Praise be to God,

The Cherisher and Sustainer of the worlds,

Most Gracious, most Merciful,

Master of the Day of Judgment,

Thee do we worship

And thine aid we seek.

Show us the straight way,

The way of those on whom

Thou hast bestowed Thy Grace,

Those whose (portion) is not wrath

And who go not astray."

I am writing this note in reply to an ardent Hindu friend who thus gently reproached me: "You have now given the *Kalma* a place in the Ashram. What further remains to be done to kill your Hinduism?"

I am confident that my Hinduism and that of the other Ashram Hindus has grown thereby. There should be in us an equal reverence for all religions. Badshah Khan, whenever he comes, joins in the worship here with delight. He loves the tune to which the Ramayana is sung, and he listens intently to the Gita. His faith in Islam has not lessened thereby. Then why may I not listen to the Koran with equal reverence and adoration in my heart ?

Vinoba and Pyarelal studied Arabic and learnt the Koran in jail. Their Hinduism has been enriched by this study. I believe that Hindu-Muslim unity will come only through such spontaneous mingling of hearts and no other. Rama is not known by only a thousand names. His names are innumerable and He is the same whether we call him Allah, Khuda, Rahim, Razzak, the Bread-giver, or any name that comes from the heart of a true devotee.

*Harijan*, 15-2-'42, p. 44

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(Originally appeared in "Notes" under the title "The Reason for Addition")

During the three days I passed in Shrinagar though I had prayers in the compound of Lala Kishorilal's bungalow, where I was accommodated, I made no speeches. I had so declared before leaving Delhi. But some of the audience sent me questions. One was:

"I attended your prayer meeting last evening in which you recited two prayers of the other communities. May I know what is your idea in doing so and what you mean by a religion?"

As I have observed before now, the selection from the Koran was introduced some years ago on the suggestion of Raihana Tyabji who was then living in the Sevagram Ashram and the one from the Parsi prayers at the instance of Dr. Gilder who recited the Parsi prayer on the break of my fast in the Aga Khan Palace during our detention. I am of opinion that the addition enriched the

prayer. It reached the hearts of a larger audience than before. It certainly showed Hinduism in its broad and tolerant aspect. The questioner ought also to have asked why the prayer commenced with the Buddhist prayer in Japanese. The selections of the stanzas of the prayer has a history behind it befitting the sacred character. The Buddhist prayer was the prayer with which the whole of Sevagram resounded in the early morning when a good Japanese monk was staying at the Sevagram Ashram and who by his silent and dignified conduct had endeared himself to the inmates of the Ashram.

*Harijan, 17-8-'47, p. 281*

## 79. ABOUT PRAYER AT THE ASHRAM

(From "Letter to Mrs. E. Bjerrum")

What you say about prayer at the Ashram is largely true. It is still a formal thing, soulless; but I continue it in the hope of it becoming a soulful thing. Human nature is much the same whether in the East or in the West. It does not therefore surprise me that you have not found anything special about prayers in the East and probably the Ashram prayer is a hotchpot of something Eastern and something Western. As I have no prejudice against taking anything good from the West or against giving up anything bad in the East, there is an unconscious blending of the two. For a congregational life a congregational prayer is a necessity and, therefore, form also is necessary. It need not be considered on that account to be hypocritical or harmful. If the leader at such congregational prayer meetings is a good man the general level of the meeting is also good. The spiritual effect of an honest intelligent attendance at such congregational prayers is undoubtedly great. Congregational prayer is not intended to supplant individual prayer, which, as you well put it, must be heartfelt and never formal. It is there you are in tune with the Infinite. Congregational prayer is an aid to being in tune with the Infinite. For man who is a social being cannot find God unless he discharges social obligations and the obligation of coming to a common prayer meeting is perhaps the supremest. It is a cleansing process for the whole congregation. But, like all human institutions, if one does not take care, such meetings do become formal and even hypocritical. One has to devise methods of avoiding the formality and hypocrisy. In all, especially in spiritual matters, it is the personal equation that counts in the end.

The roll call is not the ordinary roll call. It is a note of the results of the daily *yajna*, that is, sacrifice. Everyone says that he has spun. Spinning has been conceived in a sacrificial spirit. The idea is to see God through service of the millions. The day must not close without every member of the congregation confessing whether he or she has or has not performed the daily sacrifice to the

measure of Jiis or her promise. It is therefore not business at the end of the prayer, but it is the finishing touch to the prayer. It is not done at the beginning of the meeting, because those who are late should have the opportunity of registering their sacrifice. Remember, too, this is a sacrifice not intended to be made in secret. It is designed to be done in the open.

*The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi—XXXVI, (1970) pp. 304-05*

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(From "Letter to Premabehn Kantak")

If the children take no interest in any of the prayers, a special item can be included for them, as used to be done by Prabhudas. I should be happy if they sit through the prayers with faith and in stillness.

I did not say it by way of praise that the same prayers have continued for sixteen years. It was only a statement of fact. I did not wish to suggest that all have been attending the prayers for so many years. The Ashram has clung to these prayers in the face of all troubles and criticisms and quite a few people have derived peace of mind from them. All that I intended to say was that these prayers ought not to be given up or altered without a strong reason.

*The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi—XLIX, (1972), pp. 455-56*

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(From "Letter to Parasram Mehrotra")

During prayers at the Ashram, none should start reciting or singing before the leader begins. And again, the rule is that when he leads, only those can join in the recitation or singing who can do so in tune. When the whole community sings harmoniously in one tune, their singing never fails to produce an effect. Nor does silence fail. Both are beneficial, each in its proper place. In offering oblations, etc., at a sacrifice, the incantations used to be chanted aloud in the belief that thousands were witnessing the ceremony with reverence. Once that became a custom, even when only five or ten persons are present the incantations at a sacrifice continue to be chanted aloud.

*Ibid, p. 215*

(Original: "Prayer")

Prayer is the very foundation of the Ashram. We should, therefore, clearly understand what it means. If it is not offered from the heart, it is no prayer at all. We rarely see anybody dozing while eating. Prayer is a million times more important than food. If anybody dozes at prayer time, his condition must be pitiable indeed. If we miss the prayer, we should feel deeply pained. We should not mind if we miss a meal, but we should never miss a prayer. Missing a meal is sometimes beneficial for health. Omitting prayer never is.

If any person dozes at the time of prayer, feels lazy or talks with his neighbours while the prayer is going on, does not fix his attention on it and lets his thoughts wander, he has as good as absented himself from it. His physical presence is mere show. He is, therefore, doubly guilty; he has absented himself from the prayer and has deceived the people. To deceive means to act untruthfully, and, therefore, to violate the vow of truth.

If, however, anybody feels sleepy or bored against his will, what should he do? But this can never happen. If we run straight from the bed to the prayer meeting, we are bound to feel sleepy. Before going to the meeting, we should rouse ourselves fully and brush our teeth, and resolve to remain awake and alert. In the meeting we should not sit close to one another, should sit erect like a walking-stick, breathe slowly and, if we can speak the words correctly, join in reciting the verses or singing the *bhajans*, silently to ourselves if not loudly. If we cannot do even this, we may go on repeating Ramanama. If we still cannot control our body, we should keep standing. No one, whether a grown-up person or a child, should feel shame in doing so. Grown-up persons should occasionally keep standing, even if they do not feel sleepy, in order to create an atmosphere in which nobody would feel ashamed of standing.

Everyone should make an effort and understand as soon as possible the meaning of what is recited or sung for prayer. Even if a person does not know Sanskrit, he should learn the meaning of each verse and meditate over it.

*The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi—L, (1972), pp. 68-69*

## 80. TIME TAKEN UP BY PRAYERS

(From a letter to Pandit Khare)

We must not grudge it. Islam enjoins 5 prayers a day each of which would take at least 15 minutes, and at which the same verses have to be repeated. Christian prayers contain one permanent item which also takes 15 minutes each time. In churches belonging to the Catholics and to the Established Church in England devotions take at least half an hour in the morning, at noon and again in the evening. This is not too much for the devotee. Finally, none of us has now the right to modify the order of the various items in our prayers. The subject has been thoroughly discussed already, and the discussion closed. We have .to learn to appreciate our prayers and make them an instrument of the beatific vision. We must derive our daily spiritual nutrition from them. Let us not think of changes but pour our whole soul into them, such as they are.

*The Diary of Mahadev Desai, Vol. I (1953), p. 219*

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Prayers have often been attacked, but they have been kept up for 16 years. How much time do they take? How much of the time can be saved? Anyone who accepts the necessity of prayers will not grudge the time given to them.

*The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi—XLIX, (1972), p. 406*

## 81. FROM MANIBEHN'S NOTES

(Taken by Miss Manibehn Patel at Gandhiji's morning prayer- meetings for women in the Ashram during 1926)

The first three verses which were always recited at the morning prayers for women contain the moving appeal of Draupadi to Shri Krishna when Duryodhan attempted to pull off her clothes in the court of the Kauravas.

The verses are:<sup>1</sup>

गोविन्द, द्वारकावासिन, कृष्ण, गोपीजनप्रिय ।  
कौरवं: परिभूतां मां किं न जानासि केशव ॥  
हे नाथ, हे रमानाथ, वज्रानाथार्तिनाशन ।  
कौरावार्णवमग्ना मां उद्धरस्व जनार्दन ॥  
कृष्ण, कृष्ण, महयोगिन, विश्वात्मन विश्वभावन ।  
प्रपन्ना पाहि गोविन्द, कुरुमध्येऽवसिदतीम ॥

Draupadi showed as much strength as Yudhishtir did.

Draupadi had live husbands at one time and yet has been called 'chaste' (*sati*). This is because in that age, just as a man could marry several wives, a woman (in certain regions) could marry several husbands. The mores about marriage change with time and place.

From another point of view, Draupadi can be regarded to symbolise the human mind or intelligence (*buddhi*). And the five Pahdavas are the five senses brought under its control. And it is indeed desirable that they are so controlled. Since all the five senses were under the control of the mind and had become refined, the mind can be said to have wedded to the five senses.

The strength which Draupadi showed was immeasurable. Even Bhima and a noble king like Yudhishtir were afraid of her.

I read Draupadi's prayer in the Mahabharata when I was in prison and I cried for a long time. To my mind this prayer of Draupadi has extraordinary strength in it. Countless people recite these verses in North India.

The power of words increases or decreases in proportion to the intensity of spiritual effort underlying them. What is there in the word 'ॐ'? It is simply made up of three letters अ, ॐ and ङ. And yet its value lies in the spiritual force associated with it. When there is greater penance behind the word, its value becomes greater. The same is the case with Draupadi. She may even be regarded as just another imaginary character created by Vyasji. Such a woman may have actually existed or she may not have. But the great strength of Vyasji's own spiritual stature and the recitation by crores of human beings of the prayers composed by him for Draupadi, have raised the value of that prayer.

Govinda means the master of the senses; by Gopis are meant the thousands of sense impulses. 'Gopijana- priya' means one who is the beloved of the many or say, of the weak. Draupadi was hemmed in by the Kauravas. The Kauravas are all our base desires. Draupadi cries out 'Keshava, how is it that you do not know me?' It is the cry of all who are distressed. Do we not all have evil desires? When are we completely free from passions? When Draupadi says that she has been surrounded by Kauravas, 'Kauravas' may also mean wicked persons. But we are oppressed even more by our evil desires than by wicked persons. So it is better to interpret 'Kauravas' to mean evil desires.

Draupadi is a true servant of God and as such she has the right to chide even Him. She cries, 'Oh Master, Oh Lord, Oh Ramanath, i.e. Lakshmiapati, i.e. Lord of the World. He who gives salvation, He who brings about self-realisation, I am drowning in a sea of Kauravas, i.e. I am sinking in a multitude of wild desires; I am full of wicked passions. Save me.'

Draupadi calls out 'Krishna, Krishna'. When a person is either in great joy or in great trouble, he or she thus calls out the name twice. She says, 'I come to you for refuge; save me; I am beset with evil passions, and have become helpless. Raise me out of all this.'

\* \* \*

We are helpless like Draupadi, because we are all full of impurities and evil desires of various kinds. Our fear of snakes and such like is a proof of our weakness. I am regarded as the highest in the Ashram, but I, too, have these fears. It means that I also am more helpless than Draupadi.

Dwarka in the Gita means the whole world, or our own selves, not the dirty little town near Porbandar in Kathiawad.

\* \* \*

You should give up the idea, "I have no one in the world". God is the help of all. It is possible to throw the blame for the present sorry condition of women on their husbands. But women should only think how best they can cast off their own weakness themselves.

\* \* \*

There can be only one prayer for us all. If we offer this prayer daily, understanding it properly, it will forever be present in our thoughts. Keshava (God) is always with us. He is not in some place called Dwarka. That is only the language of the poet. Draupadi forgot that Keshava was always present everywhere. He clothed her body again and again while Duryodhana was pulling her clothes off. Whenever evil thoughts or evil desires spring in our mind, we should ask ourselves why such thoughts should come to us and think of these verses.

\* \* \*

[Once Bapu thus spoke about manual work:]

If a labourer does all his work dedicating it to God, then he can attain self-realisation. Self-realisation means purity of self. Strictly speaking, only those who do bodily labour achieve self-realisation; because 'God is the strength of the weak'. By 'weak' is not meant 'weak in body', though for them too their strength is God—but we should take it to mean weak in means and equipment. The labourer must cultivate humility. An exclusive development of the intellect may lead to the development of a diabolic kind of intelligence. By doing merely

intellectual work, we develop satanic tendencies. It is, for this that the Gita says that he who eats without doing labour eats stolen food. Humility is inherent in each act of labour. And that is why it is *Karmayoga*, or activity that leads to salvation. Doing physical work simply for getting money is no *Karmayoga*, since the idea is simply to earn money. Cleaning of latrines for earning money is no *yajna* (sacrifice). But the same act, if done by way of service, for the sake of sanitation and for the good of others, becomes *yajna*. One who does physical labour out of a spirit of service, in all humility and for self-realisation, gets self-realisation. Such a person would never feel reluctant to work. He should ever be tireless.

\* \* \*

I would certainly worship an idol even made of clay, if thereby my heart feels lighter. If my life seems satisfying and meaningful, fruitful, then the worship of young Krishna's idol has meaning. The stone is no God; but God resides in the stone. If ever I besmear an idol with sandal-wood paste, make an offering of rice, and pray to it for strength to kill others, I hope one of you will have the strength to pick the idol up and throw it into a well or even break it into pieces.

\* \* \*

If we wish to develop in us the capacity to look on all as equals, we should also aim at getting only what the rest of the world gets. Thus, if the whole world gets milk, we may also have it. We may pray to God and say, "O God, if you wish me to have milk, give it first to the rest of the world." But who can pray thus? Only he who has so much sympathy for others and who labours for their good. Even if we cannot practise this principle, we must at least understand and appreciate it. For the present, our only prayer to God should be that since we are fallen so low he should accept whatever little we are capable of doing. Even if we do not progress very far in this direction, he should give us strength to lessen our possessions. If we repent of our sins, they will at least not increase further. We should not keep anything with us thinking it as our own, but should strive to give up as many of our possessions as we can.

\* \* \*

This body is sometimes called a precious gift. If we remain devoted to God, it will really prove to be a precious possession. But to become wholly devoted to God, we have to control the body.

\* \* \*

Passionate desire is common both to man and woman. The mind of such a person always wanders about seeking an object of pleasure. But we must understand that we have obtained this birth not for enjoying or giving such pleasures, but for self-realisation.

\* \* \*

Our temple is in our Ashram; why, it is in our hearts. A temple constructed out of a few stones has no meaning. Only a temple raised in our hearts has any use.

If our Ashram goes on well like this, and does not produce any bad people within it, it would become a place of pilgrimage.

Every pebble on the bank of the Narmada is said to be Shiva. By the Narmada we do not mean only the river near Broach, but all rivers. If we wash clean a pebble on the bank of a river and offer a *bilvapatra*<sup>2</sup> to it, the pebble becomes Shiva for us. Going a step further, if we take a lump of earth and mould it to the shape of a Shiva-idol, it also becomes Shiva for us. On the same lines, we may have the faith that Shiva resides in the hearts of us all. We are idol-worshippers as well as idol-breakers simultaneously. We are to break what is mere matter in an idol, but to worship the divine spirit within it.

\* \* \*

Devotees of God carry on activities dictated by their inner voice. But the inner voice also can sometimes deceive us. So devotees must always remain vigilant.

\* \* \*

There is no meaning in our observing sacred days and vows without understanding their significance. Such observance becomes useful both to us and to society if we understand its meaning and can explain it to others. Our

women observe Nagapanchami<sup>3</sup>, Janmashtami<sup>4</sup>, and other holy days. But they should understand why they are observing them. It is possible that the meaning of Nagapanchami is to regard the serpent as the symbol of one's enemy and it was sought through this means to inculcate the principle that one should not kill even one's enemy. In this world, there is no other creature so poisonous to man as a serpent except another man. If we find any one as full of venom as a serpent, we should learn to love him, as though he were full of nectar. From doing this, we shall learn that every human being is worthy of worship, i.e. of service.

\* \* \*

Instead of training women to use a dagger, it is better to teach them to be fearless. God's protecting hands are always over us. If we really believe in the existence of God, whom shall we fear? Even if the most wicked of persons assaults you, take Ramanama (the name of God). Most wicked persons would run away at this earnest cry to God. But if that does not happen, what does it matter? We should learn to die on such an occasion.

*Bapu's Letters to Ashram Sisters, (1960), pp. 94-114*

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1 For translation of these verses please see Appendix I

2 The leaf of a tree sacred to the Hindus

3 A religious day dedicated to worship of snakes

4 A festival celebrating the birth of Krishna

### III. RAMANAMA

*Even if you do nothing else, keep repeating Rama- nama. Some day you will suddenly see light in the midst of darkness.*

\* \* \*

*Even if I am killed, I will not give up repeating the names of Rama and Rahim which mean to- me the Same God. With these nan\es on my lips I would die cheerfully.*

\* \* \*

*I am longing to disappear from the world quietly with Ramanama on my lips.*

## 82. A GOOD SEED SOWN

From my sixth or seventh year up to my sixteenth I was at school, being taught all sorts of things except religion. I may say that I failed to get from the teachers what they could have given me without any effort on their part. And yet I kept on picking up things here and there from my surrotindings. The term *religion* I am using in its broadest sense, meaning thereby self-realization or knowledge of self.

Being born in the Vaishnava faith, I had often to go to the *haveli*. But it never appealed to me. I did not like its glitter and pomp. Also I heard rumours of immorality being practised there, and lost all interest in it. Hence, I could gain nothing from the *haveli*.

But what I failed to get there I obtained from my nurse, an old servant of the family, whose affection for me I still recall. There was in me a fear of ghosts and spirits. Rambha, for that was her name, suggested, as a remedy for this fear, the repetition of Ramanama. I had more faith in her than in her remedy, and so at a tender age I began repeating Ramanama to cure my fear of ghosts and spirits. This was, of course, short-lived; but the good seed sown in childhood was not sown in vain. I think it is due to the seed sown by that good woman Rambha that today Ramariama is an infallible remedy for me.

*An Autobiography*, (1969), pp. 22-23

### 83. WHO IS RAMA?

(From a letter)

You ask what is Rama. I may explain to you the meaning of that word, but then your repetition of that name would be nearly fruitless. But if you understand that Rama is He whom you intend to worship and then repeat His name, it will serve the purpose of the horn of plenty for you. You may repeat it like a parrot, but still it will be helpful because your repetition unlike the parrot's is backed by a purpose. Thus you do not need any symbol, and Tulsidas holds that the name of Rama is more powerful than Rama himself and suggests that there is no relation between the word Rama and its meaning. The meaning will be filled in later by the devotee in accordance with the nature of his devotion. That is the beauty of this repetition (*japa*). Otherwise it would be impossible to prove that it will make a new man even of a simpleton. The devotee must fulfil only a single condition. The name should not be repeated for show or with a view to deceiving others, but with determination and faith. If a man perseveres with such repetition, I have not the shadow of a doubt that it will be for him a universal provider. Everyone who has the requisite patience can realize this in his own case. For days and sometimes for years, the mind wanders and becomes restless, the body craves for sleep when one is engaged in repeating the name. Indeed even still more painful symptoms intervene. Still if the seeker perseveres with the repetition, it is bound to bear fruit. Spinning is a gross material accomplishment and yet it can be acquired only after our patience is sorely tried. Things more difficult than spinning demand a greater effort on our part. Therefore he who is out to attain the Supreme must undergo the necessary discipline for a long, long time and never be downhearted. I think I have now answered all your questions. If you have faith, repeat the name at all times, when you sit or stand or lie down, eat or drink. There is no reason to despair if the whole of your life-time is spent while you are at it. If you try it, you will have peace of mind in an increasing measure from day to day.

*The Diary of Mahadev Desai*, Vol. I, (1953), pp. 120-21

(From "Question Box")

Q.: You have often said that when you talk of Rama you refer to the ruler of the universe and not to Rama, the son of Dasharatha. But we find that your Ramadhun calls on 'Sita-Rama', 'Raja Rama' and it ends with 'Victory to Rama, the Lord of Sita'. Who is this Rama if not the son of the King Dasharatha?

A.: I have answered such questions before. But there is something new in this one. It demands a reply. In Ramadhun 'Raja Rama', 'Sita-Rama' are undoubtedly repeated. Is not this Rama the same as the son of Dasharatha? Tulsidas has answered this question. But let me put down my own view. More potent than Rama is the Name. Hindu Dharma is like a boundless ocean teeming with priceless gems. The deeper you dive the more treasures you find. In Hindu religion God is known by various names. Thousands of people look doubtless upon Rama and Krishna as historical figures and literally believe that God came down in person on earth in the form of Rama, the son of Dasharatha, and by worshipping him one can attain salvation. The same thing holds good about Krishna. History, imagination and truth have got so inextricably mixed up. It is next to impossible to disentangle them. I have accepted all the names and forms attributed to God, as symbols connoting one formless omnipresent Rama. To me, therefore, Rama, described as the Lord of Sita, son of Dasharatha, is the all powerful essence whose name, inscribed in the heart, removes all suffering, mental, moral and physical.

*Harijan, 2-6-'46, p. 158*

## 84. POWER OF RAMANAMA

What, then, does this Ramanama mean? Is it something to be repeated parrot-like? Certainly not. If that were so, all of us would win deliverance by repeating it mechanically. Ramanama ought to be repeated from the depth of one's heart; it would not then matter if the words are not pronounced correctly. The broken words which proceed from the heart are acceptable in God's court. Even though the heart cries out "*Mara, mara*",<sup>1</sup> this appeal of the heart will be recorded in one's credit column. On the contrary, though the tongue may pronounce the name of Rama correctly, if the lord of that heart is Ravana, the correct repetition of Rama's name will be recorded in one's debit column.

Tulsidas did not sing the glory of Ramanama for the benefit of the hypocrite who "has Rama's name on his lips and a knife under his arm". His wise calculations will go wrong, while the seeming errors of the man who has installed Rama in his heart will succeed. Rama alone can repair one's fortunes and so the poet Surdas,<sup>2</sup> lover of God, sings:

Who will repair my fortunes?

O who else but Rama?

Everyone is a friend of his on whom good fortune smiles,

None of his whom fortune has forsaken.

The reader, therefore, should understand clearly that Ramanama is a matter of the heart. Where speech and the mind are not in harmony with each other, mere speech is falsehood, no more than pretence or play of words. Such chanting may well deceive the world, but can Rama who dwells in man's heart be deceived ?

Hanuman<sup>3</sup> broke open the beads in the necklace which Sita gave him as a gift, wanting to see whether they were inscribed with Rama's name. Some courtiers who thought themselves wise asked him why he showed disrespect to Sita's necklace. Hanuman's reply was that, if the beads were not inscribed with Rama's name inside, then every necklace given to him by Sita was a burden to

him. The wise courtiers thereupon smilingly asked him if Rama's name was inscribed in his heart. Hanuman drew out his knife and, cutting open his chest, said: "Now look inside. Tell me if you see anything else there except Rama's name". The courtiers felt ashamed. Flowers rained on Hanuman from the sky, and from that day Hanuman's name is always invoked when Rama's story is recited.

This may be only a legend or a dramatist's invention. Its moral is valid for all time: only that which is in one's heart is true.

[From Gujarati: *Navajivan*, 17-5-'25]

*The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi—XXVII*, (1968), pp. 111-12

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(From "A Letter")

But for one who has never experienced peace and is in quest of it, Ramanama will certainly prove a *parasmani*<sup>4</sup> God has been given a thousand names which only means that He can be called by any name and that His qualities are infinite. That is why God is also beyond nomenclature and free from attributes. But for us mortals the support of His name is absolutely essential to fall back upon and in this age even the ignorant and the illiterate can have recourse to an *Ekakshara mantra*<sup>5</sup> in the form of Ramanama. In fact, uttering Ramanama covers the *Ekakshara* and there is no difference between 'Om' and 'Rama'. But the value of reciting His name cannot be established by reasoning, it can only be experienced if one does it with faith.

*The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi—XXXIV*, (1969), pp. 162-63

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(From a speech)

If you repeat the name of Rama on getting up in the morning and before going to bed in the evening the day will go well for you and the night pass without bad dreams.

*The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi—XXVI*, (1967), p. 7

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- 1 Rama pronounced wrongly, i.e. in the reverse, and then, meaning "dying, dying"
- 2 A medieval Hindi poet
- 3 The Vanar-hero in the Ramayana; humble and devoted servant of Rama
- 4 Philosopher's stone
- 5 *Om*

## 85. A WELL-TRIED FORMULA

(From "Notes")

It is easy enough to take a vow under a stimulating influence. But it is difficult to keep to it especially in the midst of temptation. God is our only help in such circumstances. I therefore suggested to the meeting<sup>1</sup> Ramanama. Rama, Allah and God are to me convertible terms. I had discovered that simple people deluded themselves in the belief that I appeared to them in their distress. I wanted to remove the superstition. I knew that I appeared to nobody. It was pure hallucination for them to rely on a frail mortal. I therefore presented them with a simple and well-tried formula that has never failed, namely to invoke the assistance of God every morning before sunrise, and every evening before bed time, for the fulfillment of the vows. Millions of Hindus know him under the name of Rama. As a child I was taught to call upon Rama when I was seized with fear. I know many of my companions to whom Ramanama has been of the greatest solace in the hour of their need. I presented it to the Dharalas<sup>2</sup> and to the untouchables. I present it also to the reader whose vision is not blurred and whose faith is not damped by overmuch learning. Learning takes us through many stages in life but it fails us utterly in the hour of danger and temptation. Then faith alone saves. Ramanama is not for those who tempt God in every way possible and ever expect it to save. It is for those who walk in the fear of God, who want to restrain themselves and cannot in spite of themselves.

*Young India*, 22-1-'25, p. 26

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1 Of elders at Vedchhi in Surat district

2 fierce, military tribe in Gujarat whose occupation is chiefly farming

## 86. RIDICULING RAMANAMA

(From *Harijansevak*)

Q.: You know, we are so ignorant and dull that we actually begin to worship the images of our great men instead of living up to their teachings. *Ramalila*, *Krishnalila* and the recently opened Gandhi temple are a living testimony of that. The Ramanama bank in Banaras and wearing clothes printed with Ramanama is, in my opinion, a caricature and even insult of Ramanama. Don't you think that under these circumstances your telling the people to take to Ramanama as a sovereign remedy for all ailments is likely to encourage ignorance and hypocrisy? Ramanama repeated from the heart can be a sovereign remedy, but in my opinion religious education of the right type alone can lead to that state.

A.: You are right. There is so much superstition and hypocrisy around that one is afraid even to do the right thing. But if one gives way to fear, even truth will have to be suppressed. The golden rule is to act fearlessly upon what one believes to be right. Hypocrisy and untruth will go on in the world. Our doing the right thing will result in their decrease if any, never in their increase. The danger is that when we are surrounded by falsehood on all sides we might be caught in it and begin to deceive ourselves. We should be careful not to make a mistake out of our laziness and ignorance. Constant vigilance under all circumstances is essential. A votary of truth cannot act otherwise. Even an all-power remedy like Ramanama can become useless for lack of wakefulness and care, and become one more addition to the numerous current superstitions.

*Harijan*, 2-6-'46, p. 160

## 87. RAMANAMA MUST NOT CEASE

(From "Question Box"—translated from Hindustani)

Q.: While in conversation or doing brain work or when one is suddenly worried, can one recite Ramanama in one's heart? Do people do so at such times, and if so, how?

A.: Experience shows that man can do so at any time, even in sleep, provided Ramanama is enshrined in his heart. If the taking of the name has become a habit, its recitation through the heart becomes as natural as the heart beat. Otherwise, Ramanama is a mere mechanical performance or at best has touched the heart only on the surface. When Ramanama has established its dominion over the heart, the question of vocal recitation does not arise. Because then it transcends speech. But it may well be held that persons who have attained this state are few and far between.

There is no doubt whatsoever that Ramanama contains all the power that is attributed to it. No one can, by mere wishing, enshrine Ramanama in his heart. Untiring effort is required as also patience. What an amount of labour and patience have been lavished by men to acquire the non-existence philosopher's stone? Surely, God's name is of infinitely richer value and always existent.

Q.: Is it harmful if, owing to stress or exigencies of work, one is unable to carry out daily devotions in the prescribed manner? Which of the two should be given preference? Service or the rosary?

A.: Whatever the exigencies of service or adverse circumstances may be, Ramanama must not cease. The outward form will vary according to the occasion. The absence of the rosary does not interrupt Ramanama which has found an abiding place in the heart.

*Harijan, 17-2-'46, p. 12*

## 88. RAMANAMA AND NATIONAL SERVICE

(From "Tough Question")

Q. Can a man or woman attain self-realization by mere recitation of Ramanama and without taking part in national service? I ask this question because some of my sisters say that they do not need to do anything beyond attending to family requirements, and occasionally showing kindness to the poor.

A. This question has puzzled not only women, but many men, and has taxed me to the utmost. I know that there is a school of philosophy which teaches complete inaction and futility of all effort. I have not been able to appreciate that teaching, unless in order to secure verbal agreement I were to put my own interpretation on it. In my humble opinion, effort *is* necessary for one's own growth. It has to be irrespective of results. Ramanama or some equivalent is necessary, not for the sake of repetition, but for the sake of purification, as an aid to effort, for direct guidance from above. It is, therefore, never a substitute for effort. It is meant for intensifying and guiding it in proper channel. If all effort is vain, why family cares or an occasional help to the poor? In this very effort is contained the germ of national service. And national service, to me, means service of humanity, even as disinterested service of the family means the same thing. Disinterested service of the family, necessarily, leads one to national service. Ramanama gives one detachment and ballast, and never throws one off one's balance at critical moments. Self-realization I hold to be impossible without service of, and identification with, the poorest.

*Young India*, 21-10-'26, p. 364

## 89. RAMANAMA AND NATURE CURE

During part of his illness my father was in Porbandar. There every evening he used to listen to the Ramayana. The reader was a great devotee of Rama—Ladha Maha- raj of Bileshwar. It was said of him that he cured himself of his leprosy not by any medicine, but by applying to the affected parts *bilva* which had been cast away after being offered to the image of Mahadeva in Bileshwar temple, and by regular repetition of Ramanama. His faith, it was said, had made him whole. This may or may not be true. We, at any rate, believed the story. And it is a fact that when Ladha Maharaj began his reading of the Ramayana his body was entirely free from leprosy.

*An Autobiography, (1969), p. 23*

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(From "Medicine for the Masses")

You will be pleased to know that I became a confirmed convert to Nature Cure, when I read Kuhne's *New Science of Healing* and Just's *Return to Nature* over forty years ago. I must confess that I have not been able fully to follow the meaning of *Return to Nature* not because of want of will but because of my ignorance. I am now trying to evolve a system of Nature Cure suited to the millions of India's poor. I try to confine myself to the propagation of such cure as is derivable from the use of earth, water, light, air and the great void. This naturally leads man to know that the sovereign cure of all ills is the recitation from the heart of the name of God whom some millions here know by the name of Rama and the other millions by the name of Allah. Such recitation from the heart carries with it the obligation to recognize and follow the laws which Nature has ordained for man. This train of reasoning leads one to the conclusion that prevention is better than cure. Therefore, one is irresistibly driven to inculcating the laws of hygiene, i.e., of cleanliness of the mind, of the body and of its surroundings.

*Harijan, 15-6-'47, p. 189*

(From "Who and Where is God?")

Perhaps, I am right in saying that the potency of Ramanama was brought vividly home to me in Uruli-Kanchan. It was there that I asserted that the surest remedy for all our ills was Ramanama. He who can make full use of it can show powerful results with very little outside effort.

*Harijan, 22-6-'47, p. 200*

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My conception of Nature Cure, like everything else, has undergone a progressive evolution. And for years I have believed that if a person is filled with the presence of God and has thus attained the state of dispassion, he can surmount handicaps against long life. I have come to the conclusion, based on observation and scriptural reading, that when a man comes to that complete living faith in the Unseen Power and has become free from passion, the body undergoes internal transformation. This does not come about by mere wish. It needs constant vigilance and practice. In spite of both, unless God's grace descends upon one, human effort comes to naught.

*Press Report, 12-6-'45*

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(From "Notes")

Nature Cure treatment means that treatment which befits man. By "man" is meant not merely man as an animal, but as a creature possessing, in addition to his body, both mind and soul. For such a being Ramanama is the truest Nature Cure treatment. It is an unfailing remedy. The expression Ramabana or infallible cure is derived from it. Nature, too, indicates that for man it is the worthy remedy. No matter what the ailment from which a man may be suffering, recitation of Ramanama from the heart is the sure cure. God has many names. Each person can choose the name that appeals most to him. Ishwara, Allah, Khuda, God mean the same. But the recitation must not be parrot-like, it must be born of faith of which endeavour will be some evidence.

What should the endeavour consist of? Man should seek out and be content to confine the means of cure to the five elements of which the body is composed, i.e., earth, water, *akash*, sun and air. Of course, Ramanama must be the invariable accompaniment. If in spite of this, death supervenes, we may not mind. On the contrary, it should be welcomed. Science has not so far discovered any recipe for making the body immortal. Immortality is an attribute of the soul. That is certainly imperishable, but it is man's duty to try to express its purity.

*Harijan*, 3-3-'46, p. 32

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(Original: "Ramanama, the Infallible Remedy")

Shri Ganeshshastri Joshi, *vaidya*, tells me after reading the above article, that in Ayurveda, too, there is ample testimony to the efficacy of Ramanama as a cure for all disease. Nature Cure occupies the place of honour and in it Ramanama is the most important. When Charaka, Vagbhata and other giants of medicine in ancient India wrote, the popular name for God was not Rama but Vishnu. I myself have been a devotee of Tulsidas from my childhood and have, therefore, always worshipped God as Rama. But I know that if, beginning with Omkar, one goes through the entire gamut of God's names current in all climes, all countries and all languages, the result is the same. He and His Law are one. To observe His Law is, therefore, the best form of worship. A man who becomes one with the Law does not stand in need of vocal recitation of the name. In other words, an individual with whom contemplation on God has become as natural as breathing, is so filled with God's spirit that knowledge or observance of the Law becomes second nature, as it were, with him. Such an one needs no other treatment.

The question, then, arises as to why, in spite of having the prince of remedies at hand, we know so little about it; and why even those who know, do not remember Him or remember Him only by lip-service, not from the heart. Parrot-like repetition of God's name signifies failure to recognize Him as the panacea for all ills.

How can they? This sovereign remedy is not administered by doctors, *vaidyas*, *hakims* or any other medical practitioners. These have no faith in it. If they were to admit that the spring of the Holy Ganga could be found in every home, their very occupation or means of livelihood would go. Therefore, they must perforce rely on their powders and potions as infallible remedies. Not only do these provide bread for the doctor, but the patient, too, seems to feel immediate relief. If a medical practitioner can get a few persons to say: "So and so gave me a powder and I was cured," his business is established.

Nor, it must be borne in mind, would it really be of any use for doctors to prescribe God's name to patients unless they themselves were conscious of its miraculous powers. Ramanama is no copy-book maxim. It is something that has to be realized through experience. One who has had personal experience alone can prescribe it, not any other.

The Vaidyaraj has copied out for me four verses. Out of these, Charak's is the simplest and most apt. It means that if one were to obtain mastery over even one out of the thousand names of Vishnu, all ailments would vanish.<sup>1</sup>

*Harijan*, 24-3-'46, p. 56

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(From "Weekly Letter—I" by Pyarelal) ...

A noted Ayurvedic physician told me the other day: "All my life I have been administering drugs. But since you have prescribed Ramanama as a cure for physical ailments it has occurred to me that what you say has, too, the authority of Vagbhata and Charaka." The recitation of Ramanama as a remedy for spiritual ailments is as old as the hills. But the greater includes the less. And my claim is that the recitation of Ramanama is a sovereign remedy for our physical ailments also. A Nature Cure man would not tell the patient: 'Invite me and I shall cure you of your ailment.' He will only tell about the all-healing principle that is in every being, and how can one cure oneself by evoking it and making it an active force in his life. If India could realize the power of that principle, not only would we be free but we would be a land of healthy individuals too—not the land of epidemics and ill-health that we are today.

The potency of Ramanama is, however, subject to certain conditions and limitations. Ramanama is not like black magic. If someone suffers from surfeit and wants to be cured of its after-effects so that he can again indulge himself at the table, Ramanama is not for him. Ramanama can be used only for a good, never for an evil end, or else thieves and robbers would be the greatest devotees. Ramanama is for the pure in heart and for those who want to attain purity and remain pure. It can never be a means for self-indulgence. The remedy for surfeit is fasting, not prayer. Prayer can come in only when fasting has done its work. It can make fasting easy and bearable. Similarly, the taking of Ramanama will be a meaningless farce when at the same time you are drugging your system with medicines. A doctor who uses his talent to pander to the vices of his patient degrades himself and his patient.<sup>2</sup> What worse degradation can there be for man than that instead of regarding his body as an instrument of worshipping his Maker, he should make it the object of adoration and waste money like water to keep it going anyhow? Ramanama, on the other hand, purifies while it cures, and, therefore, it elevates. Therein lies its use as well as its limitation.

*Harijan, 1-4-'46, p. 68*

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(From "Ayurveda and Nature Cure")

I have no doubt whatsoever that the spread of Ramanama and pure living are the best and cheapest preventives of disease. The tragedy is that doctors, *hakims* and *vaidyas* do not make use of Ramanama as the sovereign of cures. There is no place given to it in current Ayurvedic literature, except it be in the shape of a charm which will drive people further into the well of superstition. Ramanama has, in fact, no connection with superstition. It is Nature's supreme law. Whoever observes it, is free from disease and vice versa. The same law which keeps one free from disease, applies also to its cure. An apt question is as to why a man who recites Ramanama regularly and leads a pure life should ever fall ill. Man is by nature imperfect. A thoughtful man strives after perfection, but never attains it. He stumbles on the way, however, unwittingly.

The whole of God's law is embodied in a pure life. The first thing is to realize one's limitations. It should be obvious that the moment one transgresses those limits, one falls ill. Thus, a balanced diet eaten in accordance with needs gives one freedom from disease. How is one to know what is the proper diet for one? Many such enigmas can be imagined. The purport of it all is that everyone should be his own doctor and find out his limitations. The man who does so will surely live up to 125.

Doctor friends claim that they do nothing more than investigating the laws and act accordingly and that, therefore, they are the best Nature Cure men. Everything can be explained away in this manner. All I want to say is that anything more than Ramanama is really contrary to true Nature Cure. The more one recedes from this central principle, the farther away one goes from Nature Cure. Following this line of thought, I limit Nature Cure to the use of the five elements. But a *vaidya* who goes beyond this and uses such herbs, as grow or can be grown in his neighbourhood, purely for service of the sick and not for money, may claim to be a Nature Cure man. But where are such *vaidyas* to be found? Today most of them are engaged in making money. They do no research work and it is because of their greed and mental laziness that the science of Ayurveda is at a low ebb.

*Harijan*, 19-5-'46, p. 148

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(From "Weekly Letter—I" by Pyarelal)

Gandhiji presented Ramanama to the village-folk assembled at Uruli-Kanchan as a natural Therapeutic No. 1 for the cure of bodily ailments: "In the song that we have just sung the devotee says: 'O Hari, you are the reliever of the people's distress.' The promise here is universal. It is not qualified or restricted to any particular kind of ailment." He told them of the conditions of success. The efficacy of Ramanama would depend on whether it was or was not backed by living faith. "If you are subject to anger, eat and sleep for indulgence, not solely for sustenance, you do not know the meaning of Ramanama. Your

recitation of it is mere lip-service. Ramanama, to be efficacious, must absorb your entire being during its recitation and express itself in your whole life."

Patients began to come in from the next morning. There were about thirty of them. Gandhiji examined five or six of them and prescribed for them all, more or less, the same treatment with slight variations, according to the nature of each case, i.e. recitation of Ramanama, sun-bath, friction and hip baths, a simple eliminative diet of milk, buttermilk, fruit and fruit juices with plenty of clean, fresh water to drink. "It has truly been observed," he explained at the evening prayer gathering, "that all mental and physical ailments are due to one common cause. It is, therefore, but natural that there should be a common remedy for them, too. There is a unity of cure, as there is in disease. The Shastras say so. Therefore, I prescribed Ramanama and almost the same treatment for all the patients who came to me this morning. But we have a knack of explaining away the Shastras in life, when they do not suit our convenience. We have deluded ourselves into the belief that the Shastras are meant only for the benefit of the soul in the life to come, that the end of *dharrna* is to acquire merit after death. I do not share that view. If *dharma* has no practical use in this life, it has none for me in the next.

"There is hardly anyone in this world who is completely free from ailment whether bodily or mental. For some of these, there is no earthly cure. For instance, Ramanama cannot perform the miracle of restoring to you a lost limb. But it can perform the still greater miracle of helping you to enjoy an ineffable peace<sup>3</sup> in spite of the loss while you live, and rob death of its sting and the grave its victory at the journey's end. Since death must come soon or late to everyone, why should one worry over the time?"

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Anyone who fouls the air by spitting about carelessly, throwing refuse and rubbish or otherwise dirtying the ground, sins against man and Nature. Man's body<sup>is</sup> the temple of God. Anyone who fouls the air that is to enter that temple desecrates it. He takes the name of Rama in vain."

*Harijan*, 7-4-'46, pp. 68-69

(From "Question Box")

My Nature Cure is designed solely for villagers and villages. Therefore, there is no place in it for the microscope. X-rays and similar things. Nor is there room in Nature Cure for medicines, such as quinine, emetin and penicillin. Personal hygiene and healthy living are of primary importance. And these should suffice. If everyone could achieve perfection in this art, there could be no disease. And, while obeying all the laws of Nature in order to cure illness, if it does come, the sovereign remedy ever lies in Ramanama. But this cure through Ramanama cannot become universal in the twinkling of an eye. To carry conviction to the patient, the physician has to be a living embodiment of the power of Ramanama.

*Harijan, 11-8-'46, p. 260*

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My mother gave me medicines so far as I remember. But she did believe in spells and charms. Learned friends have faith in them. I have not. There is no connection between Ramanama of my conception and *jantar mantar* (charms). I have said that to take Ramanama from the heart means deriving help from an incomparable power. The atom bomb is as nothing compared with it. This power is capable of removing all pain. It must, however, be admitted that it is easy to say that Ramanama must come from the heart, but to attain the reality is very difficult. Nevertheless, it is the biggest thing man can possess.

*Harijan, 13-10-'46, p. 357*

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(From "Faith Cure V. Ramanama") Here is fine banter from a friend:

"I wonder whether this Nature Cure has any close relation to what is being called Faith Cure. Of course, one should have faith in treatment. But there are some exclusive faith cures, for example, for smallpox, stomach pain, etc. For smallpox, as you might know, especially in the South, no treatment is given but it is considered Divine Play. We do *poojas* to Goddess. Mariamma and it is almost miraculous to see most of the cases come out successful. For stomach pain, even

chronic cases, many make vows before the deity at Thiru- pathi; and finding themselves cured, fulfil their ablutions and other obligations. To give you a fitting example, my mother had the same pain and after her visit to Thirupathi, she is now free from the disease.

"Will you kindly enlighten me on this, and may I ask why people should not have such faith in Nature Cure also and save the recurring expenditure to the doctors who, as Chaucer said, maintain a fine conspiracy with the apothecary to keep a patient always a patient, which is part of the natural order of things?"

The examples that have been quoted are neither "Nature Cure nor yet Ramanama which I have included in it. But they do show how Nature cures without any treatment in many cases. They are undoubtedly cases which show the part superstition plays in Indian life. Ramanama, which is the centre of Nature Cure, is the enemy of superstition. Unscrupulous men will abuse Ramanama as they will any other thing or system. Mere lip-recitation of Ramanama has nothing to do with cure. Faith Cure, if I know it correctly, is blind cure such as the friend describes and thereby ridicules the living name of the living God. The latter is not a figment of one's imagination. It has to come from the heart. It is conscious belief in God and a knowledge of His Law that make perfect cure possible without any further aid. That Law is that a perfect mind is responsible for perfect health of the body. A perfect mind comes from a perfect heart, not the heart known by a doctor's stethoscope, but the heart which is the seat of God. It is claimed that realization of God in the heart makes it impossible for an impure or an idle thought to cross the mind. Disease is impossible where there is purity of thought. Such a state may be difficult to attain. But the first step in the ascent to health is taken with its recognition. The next is taken when the corresponding attempt is made. This radical alteration in one's life is naturally accompanied by the observance of all other-Nature's laws hitherto discovered by man. One cannot play with them and claim to have a pure heart. It can be said with justice that possession of a pure heart should do equally well without Ramanama. Only, I know no other way of attaining purity. And it is the way trodden by the sages of old all over the world. They were men of God, not superstitious men or charlatans.

If this is Christian Science, I have no quarrel with it. The way of Ramanama is not my discovery. It is probably much older than the Christian era.

A correspondent questions whether Ramanama avoids, bona fide surgical operations. Of course, it does not. It cannot restore a leg that is cut off in an accident. In many cases surgical operations are unnecessary. Where they are required, they should be performed. But a man of God will not worry if a limb is lost. Recitation of Ramanama is neither an empirical method nor a makeshift.

*Harijan*, 9-6-'46, pp. 171-72

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(Original: "Confusion about Ramanama") A friend writes:

"Regarding your suggested cure of malaria by Ramanama my problem is that I do not understand how to rely on spiritual force for my physical ailments. I am also not sure if I deserve to be cured and if I am justified in praying for my salvation, when there is so much misery amongst my countrymen. The day I understand Ramanama, I shall pray for their salvation. Otherwise, I would feel more selfish than I do today."

This is from a friend whom I believe to be an earnest seeker of truth. I take public notice of his difficulty, as it is typical of that of many like him.

Spiritual force is like any other force at the service of man. Apart from the fact that it has been used for physical ailments for ages, with more or less success, it would be intrinsically wrong not to use it, if it can be successfully used for the cure of physical ailments. For, man is both matter and spirit, each acting on and affecting the other. If you get rid of malaria by taking quinine, without thinking of the millions who do not get it, why should you refuse to use the remedy which is within you, because millions will not use it through their ignorance? May you not be clean and well because millions of others will not be so, ignorantly or, may be, even cussedly? If you will not be clean out of false notions of philanthropy, you will deny yourself the duty of serving the very millions by remaining dirty and ill. Surely refusal to be spiritually well or clean is worse than the refusal to be physically clean and well.

Salvation is nothing more and nothing less than being well in every way. Why should you deny it for yourself, if thereby you show the way to others and beyond showing it, actually serve them in addition by reason of your fitness? But you are wholly selfish, when you take penicillin in order to get well, although you have the certain knowledge that the others cannot get it.

The confusion lying behind my correspondent's argument is obvious.

What, however, is true is that the taking of a pill or pills of quinine is much easier than gaining the knowledge of the use of Ramanama. It involves much effort as against the mere cost of buying quinine pills. The effort is worth making for the sake of the millions in whose name and on whose behalf my correspondent will shut Rama out of his heart.

*Harijan*, 1-9-'46, p. 286

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(From "Towards Realization")

What is the mark of him who has Rama enthroned in his heart? If we do not know this, there is danger of Ramanama being much misinterpreted. Some misinterpretation is already in existence. Many sport rosaries and put the sacred mark on the forehead and vainly babble His name. It may well be asked whether I am not adding to the current hypocrisy by continued insistence on Ramanama. I must not be deterred by such forebodings. Silence thus brought about is harmful. The living voice of silence needs to be backed by prolonged heartfelt practice. In the absence of such natural silence, we must try to know the marks of him who has Rama in his heart.

A devotee of Rama may be said to be the same as the steadfast one (*sthitaprajna*) of the Gita. If one goes a little deeper it will be seen that a true devotee of God faithfully obeys the five elemental forces of Nature. If he so obeys, he will not fall ill. If perchance he does, he will cure himself with the aid of the elements. It is not for the dweller in the body to get the body cured anyhow—he who believes that he is nothing but body, will naturally wander to the ends of the earth in order to cure the body of its ills. But he who realizes

that the soul is something apart from, though in, the body, that it is imperishable in contrast to the perishable body, will not be perturbed nor mourn if the elements fail. On the contrary he will welcome death as a friend. He will become his own healer instead of seeking for medical men. He will live in the consciousness of the soul within and look to the care, first and last, of the indweller.

Such a man will take God's name with every breath. His Rama will be awake even whilst the body is asleep. Rama will always be with him in whatever he does. The real death for such a devoted man will be the loss of this sacred companionship.

As an aid to keeping his Rama with him, he will take what the five elements have to give him. That is to say, he will employ the simplest and easiest way of deriving all the benefits he can from earth, air, water, sunlight and ether. This aid is not complementary to Ramanama. It is but a means of its realization. Ramanama does not in fact require any aid. But to claim belief in Ramanama and at the same time to run to doctors do not go hand in hand.

A friend versed in religious lore who read my remarks on Ramanama sometime ago wrote to say that Ramanama is an alchemy such as can transform the body. The conservation of the vital energy has been likened to accumulated wealth, but it is in the power of Ramanama alone to make it a running stream of ever-increasing spiritual strength ultimately making a fall impossible.

Just as the body cannot exist without blood, so the soul needs the matchless and pure strength of faith. This strength can renovate the weakness of all man's physical organs. That is why it is said that when Ramanama is enshrined in the heart, it means the rebirth of man. This law applies to the young, the old, man and woman alike.

This belief is to be found in the West too. Christian Science gives a glimpse of it. But India needs no outside support for a belief which has been handed down to her people from time immemorial.

*Harijan, 29-6-'47, p. 212*

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(From "Weekly Letter" by Pyarelal)

With reference to an Ashram worker who got mentally deranged and became violent, and so had to be put in confinement, Gandhiji said: "He is a fine worker. After his recovery last year, he looked after the garden and kept the hospital accounts. He worked diligently and was happy in his work. Then, he got malaria and was given a quinine injection because injection works quicker. He says the injection has gone to his head and is responsible for his mental affection. While I was working in my room this morning, I found him wandering to and fro outside, shouting and gesticulating. I went out to him and walked with him. He was quieted. But the moment I left him, he became uncontrollable again. He gets violent too, and listens to no one. So, he had to be sent to jail.

"It has naturally hurt me to think that one of our workers should be sent to jail. I may be asked: 'What about your Ramanama which you have claimed to be a cure-all?' Even in the face of this failure, let me reiterate that my faith remains intact. Ramanama can never fail. The failure only means a lack in us. We must seek the cause of failure within us."

*Harijan, 1-9-'46, p. 291*

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1 विष्णुं सहस्रमूर्धानिं चराचरपतिं विभुम ।

स्तुवान्नाम्साहास्रेण ज्वरान सर्वान व्यपोहति ॥

2 We want healers of souls rather than of bodies. The multiple city of hospitals and medical men is no sign of civilization. The less we and others pamper our body, the better for us and the world.

3 There is no greater spell-binder of peace than the name of Gandhiji, *Press Report, 10-1-'46*

## 90. RAMANAMA

(From "Speech at Conference of Missionary Societies in Great Britain and Ireland")

To think of God as 'God' does not fire me as the name Rama does. There is all the poetry in it. I know that my forefathers have known him as Rama. They have been uplifted for Rama, and when I take the name of Rama, I arise with the same energy. It would not be possible for me to use the name 'God' as it is written in the Bible. It is so contrary to experience. I should not be lifted to the truth. Therefore my whole soul rejects the teaching that Rama is not my God.'

*The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi—XLVIII, (1971), p. 127*

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(From "Weekly Letter" by M. D.)

Hanuman tore open his heart and showed that there was nothing there but Ramanama. I have none of the power of Hanuman to tear open my heart, but if any one of you feel inclined to do it, I assure you will find nothing here but love for Rama whom I see face to face in the starving millions of India.

*Young India, 24-3-'27, p. 23*

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(By Manubehn Gandhi)

At Amki I could not get goat's milk for Bapu. I tried my best to procure it but failed. So I had to inform Bapu who said to me, "What does it matter? For goat's milk the white juice of the coconut will do as well and fresh coconut oil will serve the purpose of ghee."

Bapu showed me how to prepare them and accordingly I gave them to him. As he usually took eight ounces of goat's milk he took the same quantity of coconut milk too. But he could not digest it and so had an attack of diarrhoea. The frequent motions made him weaker and weaker till- in the evening when he was coming back to the hut he felt a reeling sensation and was about to fall. Generally symptoms like yawning, perspiration, coldness of hands and feet etc.

would precede such a reeling sensation in his case. I thought from his yawns that he was about to feel giddy but I was mistaken. Bapu who was walking with my support was already collapsing. I held his head with care and shouted for Nirmalbabu. He came and we both helped Bapuji to bed. Then it struck me that I should call for Dr. Sushilabehn who was in a village near-by. I feared that I would be taken for a fool if Bapuji's illness suddenly took a serious turn and if I did not call for her in time. I wrote a chit and just as I was giving it to Nirmalbabu for despatching, Bapu woke up from his trance and called out, "Manudi" (that was Bapu's term of endearment for me), "I do not like your calling Nirmalbabu. As you are still young, however, I can excuse you. But at such a time I expect you to do nothing else but take Ramanama with all your heart. As for myself I was already engrossed in taking His name. I would have liked it immensely had you started taking Ramanama instead of shouting for Nirmalbabu. Now don't inform Sushila or call her. The real doctor is Rama. As long as Rama needs service from me, He will keep me alive. When He does not, He will call me back to Himself."

A shiver passed through my body when the words "don't inform Sushila or call her" struck my ears. I snatched the chit from Nirmalbabu and tore it to pieces. Bapu saw this and remarked, "So you had already written to her." I had to admit the fact. Then he said, "Today the Lord has saved us both. On reading the chit Sushila would have left her work and immediately run to us. I would not have liked it at all. That would have made me angry with myself and you. Thank God I was tested today. I am convinced that I shall not die of sickness if Ramanama has penetrated deep down into my heart. This rule is for everybody. One has to suffer for one's mistakes and in that spirit I passed through the pain. One should have Ramanama on one's lips till one's last breath but it should not be repeated parrot-like; it should spring from the heart as was the case with Hanuman. When Sitaji presented a pearl necklace to him he broke the pearls to see if the name of Rama was written in them. We need not care to find out whether the incident actually happened or not. We may not be able to make our bodies as strong as that of Hanuman but we can certainly make our souls as great. One can realize the devotion of Hanuman if one is intent on it. If one cannot reach

that height it is enough if one makes a sincere attempt. Has not Mother *Gita* taught us to make every effort and leave the result in the hands of God? We should try our very best to follow that teaching.

"Now you have understood what my attitude is towards the sickness of anybody, be it you, me or anyone else." And that very day he wrote to an ailing sister: "There is only one panacea in the whole world and that is Ramanama. But His name could only prove effective if the rules pertaining to it are strictly adhered to. But who cares to do so?"

Strangely enough the above incident occurred on the 30th January 1947, exactly a year before his death.

That unshakable faith in Ramanama remained with him till his last breath. I did not then imagine that on the same day a year later I should have the heart-rending experience of hearing *Rama, Ra . . . .ma* as the last audible words of the great departing soul. Mysterious indeed are the ways of the Lord!

*Bapu—My Mother*, (1955), pp. 63-65

## 91. FROM LETTERS

(To An American Lady)

I am not enamoured of the idea of using divine healing for the purpose of proving the existence of divinity or efficacy of prayer. If Jesus came back to us, it is difficult to know what he would say to some of the uses that are being made of his powers of healing and other miracles attributed to him.

*Mahadevbhaini Diary, Vol. 2 (Gujarati Edn. 1949), p. 275*

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(From "Letter to Behramji Khambhatta")

The cure for suffering lies in bearing it. Man should never use his spiritual strength to cure his suffering. If Jesus uses his spiritual power to cure the sick, that does not mean that all of us should start using our spiritual power to cure ourselves. If we adopt remedies to cure the body, which is perishable, they, too, should be physical.

Hence a sick person should pray to God thus:

"O God! this illness is the result of my sins committed knowingly or unknowingly. Deliver me from my sins and give me the strength to bear this suffering."

If a sick man thinks that he is not sick, it is a kind of delusion. He is a true man who knows that he is sick but remains unaffected by his suffering. A sick person should analyse himself and, realizing that his body and soul are distinct, understand their true relation and the meaning of *moksha*.

I strongly advise you to leave off Christian science. You may, if you wish, certainly try ordinary remedies for your ailment, or do nothing and have faith in God. That's the golden mean. Take simple treatment and develop the power of endurance.

*The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi—XXXII, (1969), p. 69*

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(To Mirabehn)

It is, ...enough for us to realize that every illness is but a breach of some unknown law of nature and to strive to know the laws and pray for power to obey. Heart prayer, therefore, whilst we are ill, is both work and medicine.

*Bapu's Letters to Mira [1924-1948], (1959), p. 57*

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I do not know that... prayers add a single second to the life prayed for. But they elevate those who pray and comfort those for whom the prayers are offered.

*The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi—XLV., p. 82*

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Yeravda Mandir,  
Nov. 12, 1930

For the health of your -body you should take sitz and sun baths. And for the peace of mind, Ramanama is the best balm. Restrain yourself when any passion troubles you. There is only one way of walking in the light of God and that is to serve His creation. Indeed, there is no other meaning of God's grace or light.

Sevagram,  
Jan. 9, 1945

Your letter. Whether you get well or not—what does it matter? The more reliance we place on God, the more peace of mind shall we have. *Vaidyas* and doctors are there, of course; but they take us farther away from God. That's why I preferred to send you there. Nature cure treatment brings us nearer to God. I will have no objection whatever if we could do even without it. But why be afraid of fast or avoid pure air? The meaning of Nature Cure is to go nearer Nature—God.

*Ramanama, (1964), p. 61*

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(From " Letter to A Girl")

When you get angry, you should keep silent and overcome your anger by repeating Ramanama.

*The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi—L, (1972), p. 442*

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(From "Letter to Rameshwar Poddar")

Even if you do nothing else, keep repeating Ramanama. Some day you will suddenly see light in the midst of darkness.

*Ibid., p. 398.*

## 92. FROM AFTER-PRAYER DISCOURSES

### Ramanama—Its Laws and Its Discipline

Ramanama, said Gandhiji, could help a man in ill- health, but it had its laws and its discipline. No one could gourmandize, say "Rama Rama" and blame Gandhi if he got stomach-ache. Ramanama had its proper uses. No man could utter Ramanama, indulge in looting and hope to attain salvation. It was only for those who were prepared to observe proper discipline for the sake of self-purification.

—Bombay: 15-3-'46

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### Most Effective Remedy

Addressing the prayer meeting at Uruli Kanchan, Gandhiji said that Ramadhun was the most effective remedy for physical and mental ailments, and that no doctor or *vaidya* could promise cure by medicine. "But," he added, "God will certainly relieve you of your pains and worries if you pray to Him." But for the prayer to be effective, one must participate in Ramadhun wholeheartedly and then only one would feel peace and happiness.

There were other conditions also which one had to fulfil. One must take proper food, have sufficient sleep and not give vent to one's anger. Above all, one must live in harmony with Nature and follow its principles.

—Poona: 22-3-'46

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### Preparation Needed

Addressing the gathering after prayers, Gandhiji related that honest men and women had said to him that with all their efforts they could not say that Ramanama came to them from the heart. His reply to them was that they must go on and have infinite patience. A boy required at least 16 years' hard study in

order to become a doctor. How much more time must be necessary to establish Ramanama in the heart!

—New Delhi: 20-4-'46

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### **Purity, Inner and Outer**

A man who repeated Ramanama and thereby cleansed his inner being could not tolerate the filth outside. If millions took to Ramanama in real earnest, there would be no riots, which were a social malady, and there would be no illness. The Kingdom of Heaven would come on earth.

—New Delhi: 21-4-'46

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### **Misuse of Ramanama**

In his after-prayer discourse, Gandhiji again dwelt on the subject of Nature Cure or the cure of ailments spiritual, mental and physical, by the application principally of Ramanama. A correspondent had written to him, pointing out how some people superstitiously wrote Ramanama on their clothes so as to wear it 'next to the heart'! Others wrote Ramanama millions of times minutely on a piece of paper which they afterwards cut up into small bits and swallowed so that they could claim that Ramanama had entered into them! There were people who thought that he was self-deluded and was trying to delude others by adding one more to the thousands of superstitions which filled this superstition-ridden land. He had no answer to such criticism. He only said to himself, what did it matter if truth was abused and fraud practised in its name by others? So long as he was sure of his truth, he could not help proclaiming it for fear of its being misunderstood or abused. "Nobody in this world possesses absolute truth. This is God's attribute alone. Relative truth is all we know. Therefore, we can only follow the truth as we see it. Such pursuit of truth cannot lead anyone astray."

—New Delhi: 24-5-'46

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### How to Recite Ramanama

Gandhiji in today's discourse explained the conditions under which alone Ramanama could become an effective remedy. The first condition was that it should come from the heart. What did that mean? People did not mind going to the ends of the earth to find a cure for their physical ailments, which were much less important than the mental or spiritual. "Man's physical being is after all perishable. It cannot, by its very nature, last forever. And yet men make a fetish of it while neglecting the immortal spirit within." A man who believed in Ramanama would not make a fetish of the body, but would regard it only as a means of serving God. And for making it into a fit instrument for that purpose, Ramanama was the sovereign means.

To install Ramanama in the heart required infinite patience. It might even take ages. But the effort was worthwhile. Even so, success depended solely on the grace of God.

Ramanama could not come from the heart unless one had cultivated the virtues of truth, honesty and purity within and without. Every day at the evening prayers, they repeated the *shlokas* describing the man with a steadfast intellect. Every one of them, said Gandhiji, could become a *sthitapragnya*—, man with steadfast intellect—if he kept his senses under discipline, ate and drank and allowed himself enjoyment and recreation only to sustain life for service. If one had no control over one's thoughts, if one did not mind, for instance, sleeping in a hole of a room with all doors and windows shut, and breathing foul air or drinking dirty water, his recitation of Ramanama was in vain.

That, however, did not mean that one should give up reciting Ramanama on the ground that one had not the requisite purity. For, recitation of Ramanama was also a means for acquiring purity. "In the case of a man who repeats Ramanama from the heart, discipline and self- control will come easy. Observance of the rules of health and hygiene will become his second nature. His life will run an even course. He will never want to hurt anyone. To suffer in order to relieve other's suffering will become a part of his being and fill him with an ineffable

and perennial joy." Let them, therefore, said Gandhiji, persevere and ceaselessly repeat Ramanama during all their waking hours. Ultimately, it would remain with them even during their sleep and God's grace would then fill them with perfect health of body, mind and spirit.

—New Delhi: 25-5-'46

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### Potency of Silent Thought

In his discourse after the prayer today, Gandhiji said that they had been coming to the prayer gathering daily in order to join him in chanting Ramanama or rather in learning how to do so. Ramanama, however, could not be taught by word of mouth. But he held that even more potent than the spoken word was the silent thought. A single right thought could envelop the world. It was never wasted. The very attempt to clothe thought in word or action limited it. No man in this world could express a thought in word or action fully.

"That does not mean," proceeded Gandhiji, "that one should go into perpetual silence." In theory, that was possible. But it was very difficult to fulfil the condition by which silent thought could be made effective. He for one could not claim to have attained the requisite intensity or control over thought. He could not altogether keep out useless or irrelevant thoughts from his mind. It required infinite patience and *tapasya* to attain that state.

He was not indulging in a figure of speech, but he meant it literally when he told them on the previous day that there was no limit to the potency of Ramanama. But in order to experience that, Ramanama had to come from a heart that was absolutely pure. He himself was striving to attain that state. He had envisaged it in the mind, but had not fully realized it in practice. When that stage was reached, even the recitation of Ramanama would become unnecessary.<sup>1</sup>

He hoped they would continue to recite Ramanama in their homes severally and in company during his absence. The secret of collective prayers was that the

emanation of silent influence from one another would help them in the realization of their goal.

—New Delhi: 26-5-'46

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### No Charm Like Ramanama

Speaking at the prayer meeting today, Gandhiji gave the healing message of Ramanama and said: "Ramanama is not for the few: it is for all. He who takes this name lays by a rich store for himself, and it is inexhaustible. The more you draw upon it, the more it increases. It is infinite. As the *Upanishad* says, you take out infinite out of infinite and infinite remains behind. It is the unfailing panacea for all ills.

"But the condition is that it must come from the heart. Do evil thoughts possess you, or are you tormented by lust or greed? Then, there is no charm against it like Ramanama." And he illustrated his meaning by a parable. "Supposing you are tempted to amass a big fortune by some easy and dishonest means. If you have faith in Ramanama, you will say to yourself: 'Why should I amass for my wife and children riches which they might squander away—why not leave them a legacy in the shape of sound character and sound education and training that will enable them to earn their living by honest industry and body labour?' • Ceaseless repetition of Ramanama will dispel your delusion and false attachment and the living realization will dawn on you that you were a fool to hanker after millions for the sake of your dear ones, instead of offering them the priceless treasure of His name which frees one from all bondage and wandering. Filled with the joy of that realization, such a person will tell his wife and children: 'I have not brought for you the treasure I had set out for, but something infinitely richer.' 'Where is it, show it to us?' they will say incredulously. 'It is the Name which is richer than all treasures,' he will reply, 'because it quenches the thirst for all riches. It is enshrined in my heart.' "

—Mussoorie: 2-6-'46

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### Essence of All Prayers

In his speech after the evening prayers, Gandhiji said that he expected them to offer prayers in their own homes regularly morning and evening. There was no need for them to learn Sanskrit *shlokas*, if they did not wish to. Ramadhun was enough. The essence of all prayers was to establish God in their hearts. If they succeeded in doing that, all would be well with them, with society and the world.

—Mussoorie: 8-6-'46

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### Sheer Hypocrisy

To repeat Ramanama and to follow the way of Ravana in actual practice was worse than useless. It was sheer hypocrisy. One might deceive oneself or the world, but one could not deceive the Almighty.

—New Delhi: 18-6-'46

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### Ambrosia of God's Name

Commenting upon Mirabai's song which was sung<sup>^</sup> at the prayer, Gandhiji said that in that song the devotee asks the soul to drink deep of the nectar of God's name. Physical food and drink result in satiety, and, if over-indulged, in illness. But the ambrosia of God's name knows no such limit. The deeper one drinks of it, the more the thirst for it grows, but it must sink deep into the heart. When that happens, all delusion and attachment<sup>^</sup> lust and envy, fall off from us. Only one must persevere and have patience. Success is the inevitable result of such effort.

—New Delhi: 18-6-'46

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### Miracles That Faith Works

A man of prayer must know no disappointment because he knows that the times are in His hands who is the Arch Planner, and does everything in His good time. A man of prayer, therefore, waits in faith and patience always.

In the allegory of *Gajetidra* and *Graha*, Gandhiji went on to explain, the elephant king was seized unawares by the crocodile as he went to have a drink of water in the river and was dragged down. The more he struggled, the deeper he sank. A stage was, however, reached when -despairing of his physical prowess, he threw himself on God's grace entirely and invoked His aid, and the Lord of Dwarka came in the twinkling of an eye and rescued him.

"The moral of the story," said Gandhiji, "is that God never fails His devotees in the hour of trial. The condition is that there must be a living faith and the uttermost reliance on Him. The test of faith is that having done -our duty we must be prepared to welcome whatever He may send—joy as well as sorrow, good luck as well as bad luck. He will be like King Janaka who, when informed that his capital was ablaze, only remarked that it was no concern of his."

The secret of his resignation and equanimity, remarked Gandhiji, was that he was ever awake, never remiss in the performance of his duty. Having done his duty, he would leave the rest to God.

"And so a man of prayer will in the first place be spared mishaps by the ever merciful Providence, but if the mishaps do come, he will not bewail his fate nor lay the blame on God, but bear them with an undisturbed peace of mind and joyous resignation to His will."

—New Delhi: 20-6-'46

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### Significance of Ramanama

Explaining the significance of Ramanama to the prayer gathering this evening, Gandhiji said: "God is not a person. He is the all-pervading, all-powerful spirit. Anyone who bears Him in his or her heart has accession of a marvellous force or energy as objective in its results as, say electricity, but much subtler."

"Was he propagating a species of superstition?" he asked. "No," was his reply. "Mere repetition of Ramanama possessed no mysterious virtue as such. Ramanama was not like black magic. It had to be taken with all that it symbolized. Rather, it was like a mathematical formula which summed up in brief the results of endless research. Mere mechanical repetition of Ramanama could not give strength. For that, one had to understand and live up to the conditions attaching to its recitation. To take God's name, one had to live a godly life."

—Poona: 2-7-'46

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### Inner and Outer Cleanliness

In the course of his discourse to the prayer gathering today, Gandhiji referred, among other things, to the filthy surroundings in which the Harijan quarters were located and in which he had taken his abode. He had been, wondering why those in charge of sanitation, that is the Municipality and the P. W. D., should put up with that filth. What was the use of his going and staying there, if it could not induce them to make the place healthy and hygienic?

What was the connection between all that and the prayer? A man who did not observe the rules of external cleanliness could not pray for internal cleanliness. If the object of their attending prayer was idle curiosity, they had committed a sin by coming. If they had come to join, in the prayer, they must pray for inner and outer cleanliness. To say one thing and to do something different would be deception. No one could deceive God, because He was omnipresent and omniscient.

There was so much dirt and filth about the place. Dr. Dinshah had told him that the lavatories were so dirty that he could not use them. There were so many flies about the place that he was anxious that he (Gandhiji) might catch some infection and get killed. He himself was not worried about that. Although the two doctors with him looked after him, he did not depend on anyone except

God. The Almighty would take care of his health. But his companions did not have that faith in God.

—Bombay: 6-7-'46

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### The Sovereign Remedy

In his after-prayer speech Gandhiji referred to several letters and messages from friends expressing concern over his persistent cough. His speech was broadcast and so was the cough which was often troublesome in the evening and in the open. For the last four days, however, the cough had been on the whole less troublesome and he hoped it would soon disappear completely. The reason for the persistence of the cough had been that he had refused all medical treatment. Dr. Sushila had said that if at the outset he had taken penicillin he would have been, all right in three days. Otherwise, it would take him three weeks to get over it. He did not doubt the efficacy of penicillin but he believed too that Ramanama was the sovereign remedy for all ills and, therefore, superseded all other remedies. In the midst of the flames that surrounded him on all sides, there was all the greater need for a burning faith in God. God alone could enable people to put down the fire. If He had to take work from Gandhiji. He would keep him alive; otherwise He would carry him away.

They had just heard the *bhajan* in which the poet had exhorted man to stick to Ramanama. He alone was the refuge of man. Therefore, in the present crisis he wished to throw himself entirely on God and not accept medical aid for a physical ailment.

—New Delhi: 18-10-'47

*Ramanama*, (1964), pp. 47-57

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1 I do look forward to a time when even repeating the name of Rama will become a hindrance. When I have realized that Rama transcends even speech, I shall have no need to repeat the name.

- *Young India*, 14-8-'24

### 93. A THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

To fall ill should be a matter of shame for anyone.. Illness implies some error or other. He whose body and mind are perfectly sound, should never suffer from illness.

—Sevagram: 26-12-'44

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An evil thought is also an indication of illness. Therefore, we should guard ourselves against evil thoughts.

—Sevagram: 27-12-'44

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An infallible remedy for evil thoughts is Ramanama. The name should proceed not merely from the lips, but from the heart.

—Sevagram: 28-12-'44

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Diseases are numerous, so also are the physicians and their treatments. If we regard all disease as one and consider Rama as the one and only physician, we are freed from most of our troubles.

—Sevagram: 29-12-'44

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How strange that we should be running after *vaidyas* and doctors who themselves die, but quietly forget Rama who is eternal and is an unfailing *vaidya!*

—Sevagram: 30-12-'44

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But more strange than this is the fact that though -we know that we too have to die one day, and that as a result of doctors' treatment we can at best

prolong our existence by a few days more, we put ourselves to no end of trouble.

—Sevagram: 31-12-'44

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The young and the old, the rich and the poor — all die before our very eyes; still we will not sit at rest but •do all that we can, except relying on Rama, just to live a few days longer.

—Sevagram: 1-1-'45

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What a fine thing would it be if we understood this and placing our reliance on Rama patiently put up with whatever ailment came our way and lived in real peace!

—Sevagram: 2-1-'45

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If a man regarded as religious is suffering from illness, it means that something or other is lacking in him.

—Sevagram: 22-4-'45

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If a man's mind remains impure in spite of himself, Ramanama should be his sole support.

—On nearing Madras: 21-1-'46

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The more I think the more I realize that Ramanama recited from heart and with knowledge is a cure-all for every kind of disease.

—Uruli: 22-3-'46

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Attachment, hatred, etc., are also diseases and worse than the physical ones. But for Ramanama, there is no cure for them.

—Uruli: 23-3-'46

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Uncleanliness of mind is more dangerous than that of the body; the outer uncleanliness is, however, but an indication of the inner one.

—Uruli: 24-3-'46

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Who can describe the joy and happiness that one experiences by taking shelter in God?

—Uruli: 25-3-'46

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Ramanama is helpful to those who fulfill the conditions of its recitation.

—New Delhi: 8-4-'46

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Repetition of Ramanama becomes in vain if no corresponding service worthy of Rama is rendered.

—New Delhi: 21-4-'46

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The fear of illness accounts for more deaths than the illness itself.

—Simla: 7-5-'46

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For the cure of threefold malady, Ramanama is a sure remedy.

—New Delhi: 24-5-'46

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He who seeks refuge in Ramanama obtains the satisfaction of all his desires.

—New Delhi: 25-5-'46

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If one wants to drink the nectar of Ramanama, it is but necessary that one should drive out lust, anger, etc.

—New Delhi: 20-6-'46

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When all is well, then, of course, everyone takes the name of God; but a true devotee is he who remembers God when all goes away.

—Bombay: 6-7-'46

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The elixir of Ramanam imparts joy to the soul and rids the body of its ailment.

—Poona: 9-7-'46

*Ramanama*, (1964), pp. 58-60

## 94. IN AND WITH GOD'S NAME

(From "Shraddhanandji—The Martyr")

"Ever since I took the pledge of service I have dedicated my head to humanity. It is the easiest thing in the world to chop off my head, it does not take the slightest preparation or organization. . . . And outside protection I have never sought. In fact, it is futile to think of protecting me for I know that God Almighty is the only protector."

[*United Asia*, February, 1955]

*Homage to the Departed*, (1958), p. 198

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A warrior loves to die, not on a sick-bed but on the battle-field. . . . Death is at any time blessed, but it is twice blessed for a warrior who dies for his cause, i.e. truth.

*Young India*, 30-12-'26, p. 438

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(From "Neither A Saint Nor A Politician")

Buddha would have died resisting the priesthood, if the majesty of his love had not proved to be equal to the task of bending the priesthood. Christ died on the Cross with a crown of thorns on his head, defying the might of a whole empire. And if I raise the resistance of a nonviolent character, I simply and humbly follow in the footsteps of the great teachers.

*Young India*, 12-5-'20, p. 3

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(From "Providence Again")

I am not aching for martyrdom, but if it comes my way in the prosecution of what I consider to be the supreme duty in the defence of the faith that I hold. . . . I shall have earned it.

*Harijan*, 29-6-'34, p. 156

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I hope there will be non-violent non-co-operators enough in India of whom it will be written: 'They suffered bullets without anger and with prayer on their lips even for the ignorant murderer.'

*A Gandhi Anthology, Book I, (1958), p. 9*

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One should have Ramanama on one's lips till one's last breath, but it should not be repeated parrot-like; it should spring from the heart as in the case of Hanuman.

*Bapu—My Mother, (1955), p. 30*

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(From a prayer speech: June 16, 1947)

If someone killed me and I died with prayer for the assassin on my lips, and God's remembrance and consciousness of His living, presence in the sanctuary of my heart, then alone would I be said to have had the non-violence of the brave.

*Mahatma Gandhi—The Last Phase, Vol. II, (1958), p. 327*

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(From a prayer discourse)

I believe in the message of truth delivered by all the religious teachers of the world. And it is my constant prayer that I may never have a feeling of anger against my traducers, that even if I fall a victim to an assassin's bullet, I may deliver up my soul with the remembrance of God upon my lips. I shall be content to be written down an impostor if my lips utter a word of anger or abuse against my assailant at the last moment.

*Ibid.*, p. 101

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(From a conversation)

I do not want to die ... of a creeping paralysis of my faculties—a defeated man. An assassin's bullet may put an end to my life. I would welcome it. But I would love, above all, to fade out doing my duty with my last breath.

*Mahatma Gandhi—The Last Phase*, Vol. I, (1956), p. 562

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(To Manubehn Gandhi on the night of 29th January 1948—less than twenty hours before his assassination)

You know my faith in Ramanama. If I die due to a lingering illness, nay even by as much as a boil or a pimple, it will be your duty to proclaim to the world, even at the risk of making people angry at you, that I was not the man of God that I claimed to be. If you do that my spirit will have peace. Note down this also that if someone were to end my life by putting a bullet through me, as someone tried to do with a bomb the other day, and I met this bullet without a groan, and breathed my last taking God's name, then alone would I have made good my claim.

The End of An Epoch, (1962), pp. 28-29

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(To Manubehn Gandhi just 12 hours before his assassination)

If someone fires bullets at me and I die without a groan and with God's name on my lips then you should tell the world that he was a real Mahatma.

Ibid., p. 32

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Even if I am killed, I will not give up repeating the names of Rama and Rahim which mean to me the same God. With these names on my lips I will die cheerfully.

[United Asia, February, 1955]

Homage to The Departed, (1958), p. 196

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I am longing to disappear from the world quietly, with Ramanama on my lips.

Bapu—My Mother, (1955), p. 49

## 95. "RAMA! RAMA!"

(From "The Fateful Friday" by Pyarelal)

As Gandhiji passed through the cordoned lane through the prayer congregation, he took his hands off the shoulders of the two girls to answer the *namaskars* of the prayer congregation. All of a sudden someone from the crowd roughly elbowed his way into the cordon from the right. Little Manu, thinking that he was coming forward to touch his feet, remonstrated saying something about it being already late for the prayer and tried to stop the intruder by holding his hand. He violently jerked her off, causing the *Ashram Bhajana vali* and Bapu's spittoon and *mala*, which she was carrying in her hands, to fall down. As she stooped down to pick up the scattered things, he planted himself in front of Bapu at less than point blank range—so close, indeed, that one of the ejected shells was afterwards found caught among the folds of Bapu's clothes. Three shots rang out in quick succession from the seven-chambered automatic pistol, the first shot entering the abdomen on the right side two and a half inches above the umbilicus and three and a half inches to the right of the mid line, the second penetrating the seventh intercostal space one inch to the right of the mid line and the third on the right side of the chest one inch above the nipple and four inches from the mid line. The first and the second shots passed right through and came out at the back. The third remained embedded in the lung. At the first shot the foot that was in motion, when he was hit, came down. He still stood on his legs when the second shot rang out and then collapsed. The last words he uttered were "Rama Rama".

*Harijan*, 15-2-'48, pp. 30-31

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(From "Letter to Kasturba Gandhi"—13-9-1932)

Only one in millions meets death for which he has prayed.

*The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi—LI*, (1972), p. 52

## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX 1

(Translated from *Ashram Bhajanavali*<sup>1</sup>)

#### THE MORNING PRAYER

##### 1

Early in the morning I call to mind that Being which is felt in the heart, which is *sat* (the eternal), *chit* (knowledge) and *sukham*, which is the state reached by perfect men and which is the superstate. I am that immaculate Brahma which ever notes the states of dream, wakefulness and deep sleep, not this body, the compound made of the elements—earth, water, space, light and air.

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##### 2

In the early morning I worship Him who is beyond the reach of thought and speech and yet by whose grace all speech is possible. I worship Him whom the Vedas describe as *neti neti* (not this, not this). Him they, the sages, have called God of gods, the unborn, the unfallen, the source of all.

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##### 3

In the early morning I bow to Him who is beyond darkness, who is like the sun, who is perfect, ancient, called *Purushottam*, (the best among men) and in whom (through the veil of darkness) we fancy the whole universe as appearing even as (in darkness) we imagine a rope to be a snake.

---

##### 4

O! Goddess Earth with the ocean for thy garment, mountains for thy breasts, thou consort of Vishnu (the Preserver), I bow to thee; forgive the touch of my feet.

**NOTE:** Bowing to the earth, we learn to be humble as the earth which supports the beings that tread upon it. Earth therefore is rightly the consort of the Preserver.

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5

May the Goddess Saraswati (of learning), the destroyer completely of black ignorance, protect me. She who is white as the *mogra* flower or the moon and a garland of snow, who has worn white robes, whose hands are adorned with the beautiful bamboo of her *veena* (a kind of violin), who is seated on a white lotus and who is always adored by Brahma, Vishnu, Siva and the other gods.

---

6

O God with a curved mouth, big body, refulgent like ten million suns, keep me ever free from harm whilst doing beneficent acts.

**NOTE:** This is addressed to God represented by the mystic letter 'ॐ' pronounced 'Om' Mark its curved mouth and big body. Its mystic splendour has been sung by the Upanishads.

---

7

Guru (teacher) is Brahma, he is Vishnu, he is Mahadev, he is the great *Brahman* itself. I bow to that guru.

**NOTE:** This refers of course to the spiritual teacher. This is not a mechanical or artificial relationship. The teacher is not all these in reality but he is all that to the disciple who finds his full satisfaction in him and imputes perfection to him who gave him a living faith in a living God. Such a guru is a rarity, at least nowadays. The best thing is to think of God Himself as one's Guru or await the Light in faith.

---

8

I bow to Vishnu, who is peace incarnate, who lies on a snaky bed, from whose navel grows the lotus, who is the supreme lord of the god, who sustains the universe, who is like unto the sky, who has the colour of clouds, whose body is blissful, who is the lord of Lakshmi (goddess of good fortune), who has lotus-like eyes, who is knowable by the yogis through meditation, who dispels the fear of the wheel of birth and death and who is the sole Ruler of all the worlds.

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9

Forgive, O merciful and blessed Mahadev, all those sins of mine, of commission or omission, mental or actual and whether done through the hands or the feet, the speech, the ears or the eyes. Let Thy will be done.

---

10

I desire neither earthly kingdom nor paradise, no, not even release from birth and death. I desire only the release of afflicted life from misery.

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11

Blessed be the people; may the rulers protect their kingdoms by just means, may it be always well with the cow<sup>2</sup> and the Brahmin;<sup>3</sup> may all the peoples be happy.

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12

I bow to Thee the *sat* (see first verse), the cause of the universe, I bow to Thee the *chit* (1st verse), the refuge of the world, I bow to Thee the one without a second, the giver of salvation, I bow to Thee the Brahman, the all-pervading, the eternal.

---

13

Thou art the only refuge, Thou art the only one to be desired, Thou art the sole protector of the universe, Thou art self-revealed, Thou art the sole creator, preserver and destroyer of the universe, Thou alone art supreme, immovable, unchangeable.

---

14

Of all the fears, Thou art the chief, of all that is terrible. Thou art the most terrible, Thou art the motion of all life, Thou art the holy of holies, Thou art the sole regulator of the mightiest places, Thou art the greatest among the great. Thou art the chief among all protections.

---

15

We think of Thee, we worship Thee, we bow to Thee as the witness of this universe, we seek refuge in Thee the *sat*, our only support, yet Thyself needing none, the ruler, the barque in the midst of this ocean of endless birth, and death.

*The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi –XLIV, (1971), pp. 386-90*

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**Kumar Mandir Prayer**

1

Om! may God protect us, may He support us, may we make joint progress, may our studies be fruitful, may we never harbour ill will against one another. Om *shanti, shanti, shanti.*

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2

Om! From untruth lead me unto truth, from darkness lead me unto light, from death lead me unto life everlasting.

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3

I bow to Thee, O God, who being almighty and having entered my heart, gives by His power life to the silent tongue, the hands feet, ears, skin and other members of the body.

*Ibid*, pp. 398-99

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**Women's Prayer**

1

O Govind, dweller of Dwarika, Krishna, Thou beloved of the Gopis, O Keshav, dost Thou not know that the Kauravas have surrounded me?

O Lord, Thou Lord of Lakshmi, protector of Vraja, deliverer from affliction, O Janardana, save me [from] the ocean of misery in the shape of the Kauravas.

O Krishna, Thou great Yogi, soul and protector of the universe O Govind, deliver me lying hopeless in the midst of the Kauravas and seeking thy support.

---

2

Act righteously, never unrighteously; speak truth, never untruth; look far ahead, never shortsightedly; look above; never below.

---

3

Ahimsa, truth, non-stealing, purity and self-control, these, said Manu, are the common duty of all the four divisions.

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4

Ahimsa, truth, non-stealing, freedom from passion, anger and greed, wishing the well-being and good of all that lives is the duty common to all the divisions.

---

5

Understand that to be religion which the wise, the good and those that are free from likes and dislikes follow and which is felt in the heart.

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6

Listen to the essence of religion and assimilate it through the heart: one should never do to others which one would not wish done to oneself.

That which has been said in countless books I shall say in half a verse: service of others is virtue, injury to others is sin.

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7

The sun, the moon, the wind, the fire, the sky, the earth, the waters, the heart, the god of judgment, the day, the night, the evening, the morning and *dharma* itself are witnesses to man's actions, i.e. he can conceal nothing.

*Ibid*, pp. 399-400

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1 *Ashram Bhajana vali* is a collection of devotional songs which formed part of the morning and evening prayers at Gandhiji's ashrams.

2 Note by Gandhiji: "Cow=agriculture"

3 Note by Gandhiji: "Brahmin=education"

## APPENDIX II

### GANDHIJI'S FAVOURITE HYMNS

(The following were among the favourite hymns of Gandhiji and they were usually sung at his prayer-gatherings.)

#### The True Vaishnava

He is a real *Vaishnava*, who feels the suffering of others as his own suffering. He is ever ready to serve, and is never guilty of overweening pride. He bows before everyone, despises none, preserves purity in thought, word and deed. Blessed is the mother of such a son: in every woman he reveres his mother. He preserves equanimity and never stains his mouth with falsehood, nor touches the riches of another. The bonds of desire cannot hold him. Ever in harmony with Ramanama, his body in itself possesses all the places of pilgrimage. He knows neither desire nor disappointment, neither passion nor wrath.

—Narasimha Mehta

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#### The Path of Love

"The way of the Lord is open only to heroes, to cowards it is fast shut.

"Give up thy life and all that thou hast, so thou mayst assume the name of the Lord.

"Only he who leaves his son, his wife, his riches, and his life, shall drink from the vessel of God.

"For in truth, he that would fish for pearls must dive into the deepest depths of the sea and take his life in his hands.

"Death affrights him not: he forgets all the misery of body and soul.

"He who stands hesitating on the bank and fears to dive, gains nought.

"But the path of love is trial by fire. The coward shrinks back from it.

"He who dares the leap into the fire, attains to everlasting bliss\*."

—Pritama

### **My Heartfelt Prayer**

"Lord, preserve me from looking on things which arouse evil thoughts. It were better for me to be blind.

"Lord, preserve me from soiling my lips with impure words. It were better for me to be dumb.

"Lord, preserve me from hearing any word of slander and insult. It were better for me to be deaf.

"Lord, preserve me from looking with desire on any of those who should be my sisters. It were better for me to be dead."

—Tukaram

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### **Lead Kindly Light**

Lead, kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom, Lead Thou me on;

The night is dark, and I am far from home; Lead Thou me on.

Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see

The distant scene; one step enough for me.

I was not ever thus, nor pray'd that Thou Shouldst lead me on;

I loved to choose, and see my path; but now Lead Thou me on.

I loved the garish day, and, spite of fears,

Pride ruled my will: remember not past years.

So long Thy power hath blest me, sure it still Will lead me on.

O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, till The night is gone;

And with the morn those Angel faces smut,

Which I have loved long since, and lost awhile.

—Cardinal Newman

---

### **The Wondrous Cross**

When I survey the wondrous Cross  
On which the Prince of Glory died,  
My richest gain I count but loss,  
And pour contempt on all my pride.  
Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast  
Save in the Cross of Christ, my God;  
All the vain things that charm me most,  
I sacrifice them to His Blood.  
See from His Head, His Hands, His Feet,  
Sorrow and love flow mingling down;  
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,  
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?  
Were the whole realm of nature mine,  
That were an offering far too small;  
Love so amazing, so divine,  
Demands my soul, my life, my all.  
To Christ, Who won for sinners grace  
By bitter grief and anguish sore,  
Be praise from all the ransom'd race,  
Forever and evermore.

—I. Watts

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### **Rock of Ages**

Rock of Ages, cleft for me,  
Let me hide myself in Thee;  
Let the Water and the Blood,  
From Thy riven Side which flow'd,  
Be of sin the double cure,

Cleanse me from its guilt and power.

Not the labours of my hands  
Can fulfill Thy law's demands;  
Could my zeal no respite know,  
Could my tears for ever flow,  
All for sin could not atone;  
Thou must save, and Thou alone.

Nothing in my band I bring,  
Simply to Thy Cross I cling;  
Naked, come to Thee for dress;  
Helpless, look to Thee for grace;  
Foul, I to the Fountain fly;  
Wash me, Saviour, or I die.

While I draw this fleeting breath,  
When my eyelids close in death,  
When I soar through tracts unknown,  
See Thee on Thy Judgment Throne;  
Rock of Ages, cleft for me,  
Let me hide myself in Thee.

—A. M. Toplady

## The Sermon on the Mount

**Blessed** are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.

**Blessed** are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. **Blessed** are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. **Blessed** are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

**Blessed** are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. **Blessed** are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. **Blessed** are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.

**Blessed** are they which are persecuted for righteousness\* sake: for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.

—Gospel of Matthew

\* \* \*

*This Was Bapu*, (1959), pp. 158-62

(The following 6 letters were written to help Esther Faering during the days when the announcement of her betrothal to Dr. E. K. Menon brought a storm of criticism, much of it harsh and ungenerous, upon her head.)

### "My Share in Your Sorrow"

More things are wrought by prayer

Than this world dreams of.

Wherefore let thy voice

Rise like a fountain for me night and day.

For what are men better than sheep or goats

That nourish a blind life within the brain,

If knowing God they lift not hands of prayer

Both for themselves and those who call

them friend?

For so the whole round earth is every way

Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.

Tennyson

My dear child,

The above is my share in your sorrow for today. May it lighten your burden.

With love,

Bombay,  
16th March, 1920

Yours,  
Bapu

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**“In All Things Thee to See”**

Teach me, my God and King,

In all things Thee to see,

And what I do in anything,

To do it as for Thee,

All may of Thee partake,

Nothing can be so mean

Which with this tincture, 'for Thy sake',

Will not grow bright and clean.

A servant with this clause

Makes drudgery divine;

Who sweeps a room as for Thy laws

Makes that and th' action fine.

This is the famous stone

That turneth all to gold;

For that which God doth touch and own

Cannot for less be told.

George Herbert

My dear child,

May there be some line, some word, some thought to soften your grief.

With love,

Bombay,  
17th March 1920

Yours,  
Bapu

---

### "Such Use as He Will"

Lord, it belongs not my care

Whether I die or live;

To love and serve Thee is my share,

And this Thy grace must give.

If life be long I will be glad

That I may long obey;

If short, yet why should I be sad

To soar to endless day?

Christ leads me through no darker rooms

Than He went through before;

He that into God's kingdom comes

Must enter by this door.

Come, Lord, when grace hath made me meet

Thy blessed face to see;

For if Thy work on earth be sweet,

What will Thy glory be?

My knowledge of that life is small;

The eye of faith is dim;

But 'tis enough that Christ knows all,  
And I shall be with Him.

Richard Baxter

My dear child,

Another evening has come to fill me with thoughts of you. I pass them to our common Maker to make of them such use as He will for your good.

With love,

Yours,  
Bapu

---

### "Self"

Oh I could go through all life's troubles singing,

Turning each night to day,

If self were not so fast around me, clinging

To all I do or say.

My very thoughts are selfish, always building

Mean castles in the air,

I use my love of others for a gilding

To make myself look fair.

I fancy all the world engrossed with judging

My merit or my blame,

Its warmest praise seems an ungracious grudging

Of praise which I might claim.

Alas! no speed in life can snatch us wholly

Our of self's hateful sight,

And it keeps step, when'er we travel slowly

And sleeps with us at night.

O Lord that I could waste my life for others,

With no ends of my own,

That I could pour myself into my brothers

And live for them alone.

My dear child,

You have forgotten your promise. Do not keep me without anything from you for so many days. The above is my selection for the day.

With love,

Yours,  
Bapu

---

### **"In Our Father's House at Last"**

I say to thee, do thou repeat

To the first man thou mayest meet

In lane, highway or open street—

That he and we and all men move

Under a canopy of love,

As broad as the blue sky above;

That doubt and trouble, fear and pain,

And anguish all are shadows vain.

That death itself shall not remain,

That weary deserts we may tread,

A dreary labyrinth may thread,

Through dark ways underground be led,

Yet, if we all one Guide obey,

The dreariest path, the darkest way  
Shall issue out in heavenly day;  
And we on diverse shores now cast,  
Shall meet, our perilous voyage past,  
All in our Father's house at last.

Trench

My dear child,

I am on the train to Delhi. I could not go out for rest. I sent you nothing yesterday. I could not. This may be my last for some days because I shall not know what will happen from day to day. Do let me have a line from you.

With love,

Bapu

Sunday,  
21-3-'20

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### "Humility"

Monday, . . .  
1920

My dear child,

Here is my selection for today:

"He that is down needs fear no fall He that is low, no pride, He that is humble ever shall have God to be his guide. I am content with what I have Little be it or much And Lord! contentment, still, I crave Because Thou savest such. Fullness to such a burden is That go on pilgrimage, Here little and hereafter bliss, Is best from age to age."

J. Bunyan

With love,

Yours,  
Bapu  
*"My Dear Child"*, (1959), pp. 61-66

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