

Prayer and Meditation (*Bhakta* or *jñāni*¹?)

Prayer = A reverent petition made to God... or another object of worship. An act of communion with God... or another object of worship, such as in devotion, confession...².

Meditation = «To continuously focus (the *citta*) on a single point is meditation»³: it is to reach the suspension of mental modifications.

The position of who prays might seem to be different from the position of who meditates. A *bhakta* may believe that a *jñāni* abstracts himself from this existential plane; vice versa, a *jñāni* may believe that a *bhakta* is too attached to this existence.

There is indeed difference between the two positions; however, things should be simply viewed from where one is, without passing any judgment. On a certain level, the two positions can go together, intertwine each other, and live in osmosis in a *jñāni* as much as in a *bhakta*. To truly experience them, however, it is necessary to reach the center of consciousness or, in alchemic terms, rectify and fix Mercury.

It is necessary, in other words, to comprehend one's own time and proceed by stages.

When the disciple's *vṛtti* still prevail, *prayer* and the form of devotion it implies can result more realistic and useful than the *jñāni*'s discerning tool. In most cases, a disciple, before meditating, must go through various stages in his *sādhāna*. He must start from the most difficult and delicate phase, which is also the most important, that is the *purification* of the entire vehicular mass (cognition-action), both gross and subtle. Only after achieving this "Opus", it is possible to detach oneself from the objective world⁴ and especially from the subjective one. And only after such victory, one can achieve the meditative *āsana*⁵.

First of all, we have to look at the "mystery" of descending to the lower world, which is particularly difficult to comprehend and achieve⁶. During this initial stage, prayer can represent an effective tool for the *jñāni* to be, as it gives the possibility to renounce to the ego in favor of a universal form to which one can anchor oneself so as to avoid drowning in the dark and tumultuous sea of sub-conscious. Due to its ascetic pathos (*tapas*), prayer helps to renounce one's own vanity, directing vital energy to the divinity or universal form. The vault key to comprehend the meaning of prayer is "Devotion-communion". Devotion is, in fact, source of deep connection with the divine principle of Love. It is Love that creates the ascetic heat through which one can detach from profanity. In this sense, prayer is *ṛta*, *communion*, *sharing* with the Divine; it is a

¹ In this context, the word *jñāni* is used to refer to who chooses a *sādhāna* whose realizative means is knowledge, and not in the more complete sense of who achieved Ultimate Knowledge.

² The American Heritage dictionary. Houghton Mifflin Company.

³ Patañjali, *Yogadarśana*, Ch. III *sūtra* 2. Editions Āsram Vidyā. Roma, 1992. Square parentheses are ours.

⁴ «*Pratyāhāra* is reached when the senses are not in contact with their related objects, identifying, thus, with the true nature of the mind [which remains still and colorless]». Patañjali, *Yogadarśana*, *sūtra* 54. Op. Cit.

⁵ With respect to this *Opus*, see Patañjali, *Yogadarśana*. Op. Cit.

⁶ Cp. ch. "Rectification of the Common Fires" (*Nigredo*) in Raphael, *The Threefold Pathway of Fire*. Aurea Vidyā, New York, 2000.

station in which the pause that is generated subtracts vital energy from the ego so as to re-create the strong and pristine connection between the *jīva* reflection and its Source.

When pray is full of consciousness, it is essentially polar, that is inclusive of the soul's exigency to unite with the *natural* divine in pursuit of real metaphysical Unity.

Invocation, thus, should be directed to Universal beings not through words coming from our *manas* but through words coming from our heart.

The *words* that Jesus Christ directs to the Lord⁷ or those that Śaṅkara directs to the *Devī*⁸ can help us understand the esoteric nature of prayer. Devotion-prayer gradually creates detachment from this world and helps the praying one intuit his own similarity with the divine. Only when full detachment is achieved, one is ready for the interior *quest* of Identity with *That*. Then, meditation becomes the right tool to achieve Such Aim.

True prayer, not the one directed to the ego, is aspiration for Truth, for Freedom from the chains of suffering-ignorance.

If we are not ready for true meditation, if, deep down, we are not ready yet to let the ego die, we can at least PRAY with profound Humbleness to open our consciousness to the metaphysical and spiritual gift of Universal Tradition. As our consciousness becomes ready to embrace this initial phase, we are certain we can sow the seed of pure meditation-contemplation in the fertile terrain of prayer.

The parable of the mines from the Gospel⁹ may help us comprehend how we can partake to the *Easter gifts or mysteries*.

©Āśram Vidyā, 2005.

Friday, October 28, 2005

⁷ Saint John's *Gospel*, Ch. XVII, 1-26

⁸ Arthur & Ellen Avalon, *Hymns to the Goddess*. 1913 by Ganesh & Co., Madras, India.

⁹ Saint Luke's *Gospel*, Ch. XIX, 12-26