

“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 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 set-back 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 under-rating 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 super-imposed upon as 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 child-like faith in the Maker of us all. That very faith is a prayer. The 'boy', on whose letter I based by 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 tillers' 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.

PRAYER, THE FIRST AND THE LAST LESSON
IN SACRIFICING SELF

(Originally appeared under the title "Let Us Pray")

There is little doubt that India is about to reach her cherished goal of political independence. Let the entrance be prayerful. Prayer is not an old woman's idle amusement. Properly understood and applied, it is the most potent instrument of actions.

Let us then pray and find out what we meant by non-violence and how we shall retain the freedom gained by its use. If our non-violence is of the weak, it follows that we shall never be able, by such non-violence, to retain freedom. But it follows also that we shall not, for some length of time at any rate, be able to defend ourselves by force of arms if only because we have neither them nor the knowledge of their use. We have not even the requisite discipline. The result is that we shall have to rely upon another nation's help, not as equals but as pupils upon their teachers, if the word 'inferiors' jars upon our ears.

Hence there is nothing but non-violence to fall back upon for retaining our freedom even as we had to for gaining it. This means exercise of non-violence against all those who call themselves our opponents. This should not mean much for a man who has used himself to non-violence for nearly three decades. It is summed up in "die for your honour and freedom" instead of "kill if necessary and be killed in the act". What does a brave soldier do? He kills only if necessary and risks his life in the act. Non-violence demands greater courage and sacrifice. Why should it be comparatively easy for a man to risk death in the act of killing and almost superhuman for him to do so in the act of sparing life? It seems to be gross self-deception to think that we can risk death if we learn and practise the art of killing but cannot do so otherwise. But for the hypnotism induced by the repetition of an untruth we should not grossly deceive ourselves.

But the critic or scoffer will ask, why bring in prayer if the matter is so simple as you put it. The answer is that prayer is the first and the last lesson in learning the noble and brave art of sacrificing self in the various walks of life culminating in the defence of one's nation's liberty and honour.

Undoubtedly prayer requires a living faith in God. Successful Satyagraha is inconceivable without that faith. God may be called by any other name so long as it connotes the living Law of Life — in other words, the Law and the Law-giver rolled into one.

Harijan, 14-4-'46, p. 80

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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 a theoretical 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 every one 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 prayer 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. 272 at p. 274

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. 392 at p. 395

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 every day 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 every one 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 peasant 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 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 images. 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 received 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 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.

II

At the morning prayer we first recite the *shlokas* (verses) printed in *Ashram Bhajanvali* (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. Dinbadhu 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 the 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 any one who respects other faiths as much as he respects his own. They do not contain any reflection on other people. Hindus 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.* 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 his 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

* Recitation of short passage from the Koran has since been made an integral part of the Ashram prayer. - V. G. D.

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 (*tapasa*) 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 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, (Edn. 1959), Chap. II

THE ASHRAM PRAYER

I

(From *Harijansevak*)

The Ashram prayer has become very popular. Its development has been spontaneous. The *Ashram Bhajanavali* (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 *Bhajanavali* 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 Sevagram. 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 कयों 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 words,
 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 govern 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 Allaha, Khuda, Rahim, Razaak, the Breadgiver, or any name that comes from the heart of a true devotee.

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

II

(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

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CONGREGATIONAL PRAYER

I

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

After the meeting was the prayer which had become an institution during our stay at Kumara Park. The last day's meeting was a treasurable experience for the presence of Mr. Andrews, and the Bjerrums who sang 'When I survey the wondrous Cross' which, Gandhiji said, transported him to Pretoria where he heard the wonderful hymn sung for the first time, and also for the parting talk that Gandhiji gave to the congregation. "How many of you have been coming here regularly?" asked Gandhiji, and most of them raised their hands.

"I am glad you have been coming," said Gandhiji. "For me it has been both a joy, and a privilege, inasmuch 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 wretch. 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. 294 at 295

II

(From "Collective Prayer")

Q.: You believe in mass prayer. Is congregational worship as practised today, a true prayer? In my opinion, it is a degarding thing and therefore dangerous. Jesus said : "When thou prayest, thou shall not be as the hypocrites are, but enter into thine inner chamber and having shut the 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

107

HOW I INTRODUCED CONGREGATIONAL PRAYER

(The following extracts are taken from an address delivered by Gandhiji in Hindustani at a mammoth gathering in Bombay of which the gist in English prepared by Pyarelal appeared under the title "Satyagraha — The Art of Living and Dying".)

"I introduced the practice of having congregational prayer some time before the commencement of the South Africa 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 a 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 Gita 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

108

THE OBJECT OF CONGREGATIONAL PRAYER

(An extract from the report of the speech of Gandhiji at an evening prayer in Bombay which appeared in “Weekly Letter” by Pyarelal is given below.)

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, p. 25

109

IS CONCENTRATION OF MIND POSSIBLE IN MASS PRAYER?

(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 do 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 case 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.

Harijan, 21-7-'46, p. 229

110

COMPULSORY PRAYER

(From "Question Box")

Q.: I am a worker in the Rajashtan 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 compulsion. 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. 193 at p. 194

111

RAMANAMA, THE TALISMAN

(Mr. Maurice Frydman wrote a long letter* to Gandhiji in which he said that external observances like prayer were not efficient means for the practice of truth and non-violence and commended the path of constant observation, awareness and alertness. Gandhiji's comment on the letter is reproduced below. The letter and the comment were published originally under the title "Mindfulness, the Remedy".)

*Omitted from this compilation.

Thus writes Mr. Frydman, better known to the public as Bhartanand. . . I have not fallen in love with it because this too has not caught on. If it was a seven days' work, why is it that it has so few witnesses in the world today? In so far as it is an aid, it is in general vogue and takes its place among the other remedies, whether it is called mindfulness, vigilance or meditation. It is in addition to these outward observances so long as the latter are not for show. Indeed, prayer is purely an inward act. Those who found in Ramanama the talisman knew mindfulness and found by experience that Ramanama was the best of all the remedies adopted for the practice of truth and non-violence.

Harijan, 16-6-'45, p. 178

112

A SURE AID

A correspondent suggests three aids to self-control of which two are outward and one is inward. The inward help he describes as follows :

“A third thing that helps towards self-control is Ramanama. This has got the terrible power of converting one's sex desire into a divine longing for the Lord. In fact it seems to me from experience that the sex desire present in almost all human beings is a form of *Kundalini Shakti* left to its own natural growth and development. Just as man has fought against nature ever since creation, so also he should fight against this natural tendency of his *Kundalini* and see that it acts upward instead of downward. Once the *Kundalini* begins to act upward its direction is towards the brain and gradually will it dawn upon such a man that he and all whom he sees around him are but different manifestations of the same Lord.”

There is no doubt that Ramanama is the surest aid. If recited from the heart it charms away every evil thought, and evil thought gone, no corresponding action is possible. The outward helps are all useless if the mind is weak. They are superfluous if the mind is pure. This must not be taken to

mean that a pure-minded man can take all the liberties and still keep safe. Such a man simply will not take any liberties with himself. His whole life will be an infallible testimony to the inward purity. The Gita truly says that mind makes the man and unmakes him. Milton paraphrases the same thought when he says:

“The mind is its own place and in itself can make a heaven of hell and hell of heaven.”

Harijan, 12-5-'46, p. 132

113

NAMAJAPA CLEANSSES THE HEART

(Gandhiji wrote a number of letters in Gujarati to an Ashram sister. These letters were translated into Marathi and published in 1938 under the title वात्सल्याची प्रसाद-दीक्षा*. The following is a rendering in English of an extract from letter No. 43 dated 30-7-1932 from Yeravda Prison.)

Namajapa cleanses the heart thus : A person who repeats *nama* with a pure heart does so with faith. He begins with the resolve that *namajapa* will purify his heart. Purity of the self follows the cleansing of the heart. One who takes the *nama* with faith will not tire in his pursuit and what is on his lips today will ultimately possess his heart and purify him. Such experience is universal and knows no exception. Psychologists are also of opinion that as a man thinks so he becomes. Ranamana conforms to this rule. I have firm faith in *namajapa*. Discovery of *namajapa* was born out of experience and understanding and is of utmost importance. The doors to purity should be open even to the unlettered and *namajapa* will unlock them. (See Gita, IX, 22 and X, 17).

*The above book was published in *Sulabh Rashtriya Granthamala* series Pune, in 1938 and was edited by Acharya Kaka Kalelkar.

THE ALCHEMY OF RAMANAMA

(Originally appeared under the title “Towards Realization”, translated from the original Gujarati)

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 per chance he does, he will cure himself with the aid of the elementals. 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 elementals 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 elementals have to give him. That is to say he will employ the simplest and easiest way of deriving all the benefit 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 sciences give a glimpse of it. In this issue of the *Harijan* Rajkumari has given illustrations culled from a book written by Seventh Day Adventists.

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

MY REFUGE IN THE DARKEST HOUR

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

Mr. Mathews was curious to know, if Gandhiji followed any spiritual practice and what special reading he had found helpful.

Gandhiji : I am a stranger to Yogic practices. The practice I follow is a practice I learnt in my childhood from my nurse. I was afraid of ghosts. She used to say to me : 'There are no ghosts, but if you are afraid, repeat Ramanama.' What I learnt in my childhood has become a huge thing in my mental firmament. It is a sun that has brightened my darkest hour. A Christian may find the same solace from the repetition of the name of Jesus and a Muslim from the name of Allah. All these things have the same implications and they produce identical results under identical circumstances. Only the repetition must not be a lip expression, but part of your very being. About helpful readings, we have regular readings of the Bhagavadgita and we have now reached a stage when we finish the Gita every week by having readings of appointed chapters every morning. Then we have hymns from the various saints of India, and we therein include hymns from the Christian hymn book. As Khansaheb is with us, we have readings from the Koran also. We believe in the equality of all religions. I derive the greatest consolation from my reading of Tulasidas's Ramayana. I have also derived solace from the New Testament and the Koran. I don't approach them with a critical mind. They are to me as important as the Bhagavadgita, though everything in the former may not appeal to me — everything in the Epistles of Paul for instance, nor everything in Tulasidas. The Gita is a pure religious discourse given without any embellishment. It simply describes the progress of the pilgrim soul towards the supreme goal. Therefore, there is no question of selection.

Harijan, 5-12-'36, p. 337 at p. 339

THE UNFAILING REFUGE

(From “Weekly Letter” by Shri Pyarelal)

At Laksham there is a refugees’ camp. And it was to the refugees that Gandhiji’s words were addressed through the crowd that had assembled at the platform to hear him and have his *darshan*. “I have not come on a whirlwind propaganda visit, I have come to stay here with you as one of you....”

“The greatest help you can give me is to banish fear from your hearts,” he told them. And what was the talisman that could do that for them? It was his unfailing *mantra* of Ramanama. “You may say you do not believe in Him. You do not know that but for His will you could not draw a single breath. Call Him Ishvara, Allah, God, Ahura Mazda. His names are as innumerable as there are men. He is one without a second. He alone is great. There is none greater than He. He is timeless, formless, stainless. Such is my Rama. He alone is my Lord and Master.”

He touchingly described to them how as a little boy he used to be usually timid and afraid of even shadows and how his nurse Rambha had taught him the secret of Ramanama as an antidote to fear. ‘When in fear take Ramanama. He will protect you,’ she used to tell him. Ever since then Ramanama had been his unfailing refuge and shelter from all kinds of fear.

“He resided in the heart of the pure always. Tulasidas, that prince of devotees, whose name has become a household word among the Hindus from Kashmir to Kanyakumari as Shri Chaitanya’s and Ramakrishna Paramhansa’s in Bengal, has presented the message of that name to us in his immortal Ramayana. If you walk in fear of that name, you need fear no man on earth, be he a prince or a pauper.”

Harijan, 24-11-’46, p. 409

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* 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 fulfilment 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 Dharalas³ 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. 25 at p. 26

*Of elders at Vedchhi in Surat district.

³A fierce, military tribe in Gujarat whose occupation is chiefly farming.

RAMANAMA IS ALL-SUFFICING

(The following passage is taken from “The Purification Week” by M. D. from where the following remarks of Gandhiji to a friend on Ramanama are taken.)

Ramanama to me is all-sufficing. There are as many names of God as His manifestations, but sages have, as a result of their life-long penance, devised names to be uttered by the devotees, in order to be able to commune with the Nameless. There are other *mantras* than Ramanama, but for me that is supreme. It has become part of my life. When a child, my nurse taught me to repeat Ramanama whenever I felt afraid or miserable, and it has been second nature with me with growing knowledge and advancing years. I may even say that the Word is in my heart, if not actually on my lips, all the twenty-four hours. It has been my saviour and I am ever stayed on it. In the spiritual literature of the world, the Ramayana of Tulasidas takes a foremost place. It has charms that I miss in the Mahabharata and even in Valmiki’s Ramayana.

Harijan, 17-8-'34, p. 209 at p. 212

WHO IS RAMA?

(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? Tulasidas 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

120

RAMA, THE SON OF DASHARATHA

An Arya Samajist writes :

“How can the Rama whom you believe to be immortal, be Rama, the son of Dasharatha and the husband of Sita? I often attend your prayer gathering with this dilemma always confronting me and because of it, I am unable to join in the Ramadhun. This hurts me for you are right when you say that all should take part in it. Cannot you make the Ramadhun, such that all can join in the recital?”

I have already explained what I mean by all. It applies to all those who can join in it from the heart and recite it in tune. The others should remain silent. But this is a small matter. The important question is as to how Rama, the son of Dasharatha, can be deemed immortal. This question was raised by saint Tulasidas himself and answered by him. The answer cannot in reality be reasoned out. It does not lend itself to intellectual

satisfaction. It is a matter of heart speaking to heart. I worshipped Rama as Sita's husband in the first instance, but as my knowledge and experience of Him grew, my Rama became immortal and omnipresent. This does not mean that Rama ceased to be Sita's husband; but the meaning of Sita's husband expanded with the vision of Rama. This is how the world evolves. Rama cannot become omnipresent for the man who regards him merely as the son of Dasharatha. But for the believer in Rama as God, the father of the omnipresent Rama also becomes omnipresent — the father and son become one. It may be said that this is all a matter of imagination. "To each man according to his faith", is all that I can say. If all religions are one at source, we have to synthesize them. Today they are looked upon as separate and that is why we kill each other. When we are tired of religion, we become atheists and then, apart from the little self, nothing not even God, exists. But when we acquire true understanding, the little self perishes and God becomes all in all. Rama then is and is not the son of Dasharatha, the husband of Sita, the Brother of Bharata and Lakshmana and yet is God, the unborn and eternal. All honour then to those who, not believing in Rama as the son of Dasharatha, still come to join in the collective prayers. This matter of Rama is one which transcends reason. I have merely tried to give to the reader my belief for what it is worth.

Harijan, 22-9-'46, p. 323

121

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 man to acquire the non-existent 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

122

INSTALLING RAMANAMA IN THE HEART

(From "Weekly Letter" by Pyarelal. Extracts from a prayer discourse of Gandhiji as reported therein are culled out below.)

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 *Sthitaprajna* — 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 or 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 run an even course. He will never want to hurt anyone. To suffer in order to relieve others' 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.

Harijan, 2-6-'46, p. 166 at p. 168

123

RECITATION OF RAMANAMA

(From "Notes"; translated from *Harijansevak*)

Q. : Is it not enough to have Ramanama in one's heart or is there something special in its recitation?

A. : I believe there is special merit in the recitation of Ramanama. If anyone knows that God is in truth residing in his heart, I admit that for him there is no need for recitation. But I have not known such a person. On the contrary, my personal experience tells me that there is something quite extraordinary in the recitation of Ramanama. Why or how is not necessary to know.

Harijan, 14-4-'46, p. 92

VAIN REPETITIONS

(From "Question Box")

Q. : All agree that mechanical repetition of prayer is worse than useless. It acts as an opiate on the soul. I often wonder why you encourage repetition morning and evening of the eleven great vows as a matter of routine. May not this have a dulling effect on the moral consciousness of our boys? Is there no better way of inculcating these vows?

A. : Repetitions when they are not mechanical produce marvellous results. Thus I do not regard the rosary as a superstition. It is an aid to the pacification of a wandering brain. Daily repetition of the vows falls under a different category. It is a daily reminder to the earnest seeker as he rises and retires that he is under the eleven vows which are to regulate his conduct. No doubt it will lose its effect if a person repeats the vows mechanically under the delusion that the mere repetition will bring him merit. You may ask, "Why repeat the vows at all? You know that you have taken them and are expected to observe them." There is force in the argument. But experience has shown that a deliberate repetition gives stimulus to the resolution. Vows are to the weak mind and soul what tonics are to a weak body. Just as a healthy body needs no tonics, a strong mind may retain its health without the need of vows and the daily reminder thereof. An examination of the vows will, however, show that most of us are weak enough to need their assistance.

Harijan, 6-4-'40, p. 73 at p. 74

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

A NEW SUPERSTITION ?

(From "Weekly Letter" by Pyarelal)

"Am I propagating a new variety of superstition ?" asked Gandhiji in the course of one of his recent prayer discourses at Poona. "God is not a person. He is the all-pervading, all-powerful spirit. Anyone who bears Him in his heart has accession of a marvellous force of energy comparable in its results to physical forces like stream or electricity, but much more subtle." Ramanama was not like black magic. It had to be taken with all that it symbolized. He likened it to a mathematical formula which sums up in brief the results of endless research and experimentation. 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 must live a Godly life.

Harijan, 14-7-'46, p. 217

RAMANAMA AGAIN

A friend sends me a letter received by him for an answer. The letter is long. I have only copied here the relevant part :

"India is in his blood, but why should he cause resentment among his countrymen who are not of his religious faith, by holding daily prayer meetings and chanting Ramanama (meaning the name of Rama, the Hindu god)? He should realize that India is full of manifold faiths and most of the conservatives are apt to mistake him (and this is one of the pleas of the Muslim League), if he openly goes on talking in the name of the Hindu gods. One of his pet terms is the establishment of Ramarajya (the rule of Rama). What would a devout Muslim feel about this?"

I must repeat for the thousandth time that Ramanama is one of the many names for God. The same prayer meetings

have recitations from the Koran and the Zend Avesta. Devout Muslims, for the very reason that they are devout, have never objected to the chant of Ramanama. Ramanama is not an idle chant. It is conceived as a mode of addressing the all-pervasive God known to me, as to millions of Hindus, by the familiar name of Ramanama. 'Nama' at the end of Rama is the most significant part. It means the 'Nama' without the Rama of history. Be that as it may, why should an open profession by me of my faith offend anybody, much less the Muslim League? No one is obliged to join these meetings and, having joined, is not obliged to take part in the chant. All that the visitors are expected to do is not to mar the harmony of the meeting and to tolerate the proceedings even when they are not in sympathy with any part.

As to the use of the phrase 'Ramarajya', why should it offend after my having defined its meaning many times? It is a convenient and expressive phrase, the meaning of which no alternative can so fully express to millions. When I visit the Frontier Province or address predominantly Muslim audiences I would express my meaning to them by calling it Khudai Raj, while to a Christian audience I would describe it as the Kingdom of God on earth. Any other mode would, for me, be self-suppression and hypocrisy.

Harijan, 18-8-'46, p. 266

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The Essence of Hinduism is so planned and arranged that each section naturally leads to the next one. The first chapter examines the moral basis of Hinduism. The nature of the universal Moral Law or Power that sustains the universe is described in the second chapter. How can a seeker come face to face with the Supreme Spirit—through faith or trained reason or a judicious combination of both? An answer to this conundrum will be found in the third chapter..

* * *

This Book is primarily meant for lay readers and Hindu boys and girls attending English medium schools and brought up in families without any religious background, or in which religion has a minimal influence. As such, it will serve as an introduction to Hinduism.

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