

EDITORIAL

One of the most intimate experiences of our life is prayer. Yet this can be a random and remote experience for many. Many may really be involved in prayer not knowing what prayer is. It can visit us in many ways, or it can emerge from us at any time. This makes us ask the questions: What is prayer? When does one really pray?

Shalini was a little girl of eight—a Hindu. When it was evening her mother told her to say her prayer and go to bed. The little girl moved to a corner of the room in which we were sitting, spent two minutes in silence and then said to God: “Now I am going. See you tomorrow.” What a beautiful prayer from a little child! Is prayer then conversation? . . . Dialogue? . . . Silence or bidding farewell?

I remembr also Cathy from New York. She was in her teens when I met her in my meditation group. The group conducted a meditation class twice a week, during the period of religious studies. After a semester course the students were asked to write a brief report of their experience. Cathy wrote: “I thought I was floating in God: I never thought prayer is like this.” Is prayer floating in God? . . . Resting in him transcending our worries of everyday life? Cathy can teach us wonderful things about prayer.

Man's life is basically an experience of finitude. Everywhere he sees only finite things. He sees himself as a finite consciousness in a finite body placed in a limited situation. Limitation of finitude is a part and parcel of his daily experience. However, the longing for transcendence is in him. He wants to overcome the structures of limitation that surround him. Every attempt of this basic transcendence is prayer in its most radical form. Prayer is thus an inner movement from the depth of one's own finitude to transcend its own limitations. Human consciousness is by its very nature a finite self-awareness. From this finite self-awareness there arises the dynamism of self-transcendence. Self-transcendence is a radical form of prayer.

Born into a situation he did not make and led by events he cannot control, man finds himself in a world of given limitation-structures. Earth-bound, time-bound, space-bound he is born into this world.

All around him he sees only finite and transient things. Time itself is a process of duration, a manner of becoming, very typical of a finite being. Yet man longs for eternity, seeks the timeless in time and looks for the Beyond and Boundless in space-bound, time-bound situations and structures of finitude. Though he is placed in a world of death and decay and experiences the *dukkhah* (sorrow) of transiency all around, he carries within himself the spirit of immortality which forces him up from within to rise above all passing phases of reality and to hold himself open to the true and the transcendent one. This openness is prayer par excellence.

This one fundamental attitude of openness or orientation may take a variety of forms. It becomes praise and petition in many official prayers. It becomes acknowledgement and acceptance of the infinite by the finite in authentic faith. It is simple adoration and absorption in meditation. It takes the shape of intimacy and union in mystic experiences. It manifests itself as enlightenment and awakening in seekers of truth and wisdom. Everywhere and in every form the attempt is to overcome the constraints of limitation. Scriptures say that man is the 'image of God' or 'spark of the divine'. Yes, the image tends to return to the original and the spark to merge with the source. This tendency is prayer in its origin and depth. Man is a praying animal whether he is aware of it or not. Encounter with a personal God does add a sublime dimension to this great metaphysical tendency of all men.

In spite of its all-pervading secularity and religiouslessness, the contemporary world has developed a great interest in prayer and various means of spiritual realization. In this context we thought it appropriate to bring out the current number of the *Journal of Dharma* on the perspectives of prayer. Naturally the number is a blend of several insights into prayer viewed from different perspectives. We start with an article on "Biblical Prayer" by the Bible scholar Dr. Lucius Nereparampil. The historical revelation of the Judeo-Christian tradition has its own way of leading the people through prayer experience. The finite man encountering a personal God is very central in this prayer-experience. Prayer, however, is also a great celebration. Mystery cults always were prayer-celebrations. Dr. Paul Kalluveetil in his article "Prayer as Celebration" illustrates how in various traditions of mankind, especially in the biblical one, prayer has become celebra-

tion. In India besides *Yagas* and *Yajnas*, feasts and fasts, prayer has developed into various forms of Yoga and meditation. Dr. Michael von Brück in his article "Prayer, Yoga, Meditation" analyses prayer from this angle of inner experience of man. Meditation is sometimes enhanced by some visual aids. Every faithful prays with a world image in his/her mind which is the sum and substance of his/her faith. Mrs. Anne Overzee presents the world visions of Rāmānuja and Teilhard de Chardin in *mandala* form to aid prayerful meditations of the same. From what has been said it is clear that prayer can have many forms. But there is one question which is uppermost in our minds. When should one pray? Is there any special time for prayer? The answer is: One may pray at any time; and any time is auspicious time. The one who engages in prayer is awakened in spirit. Yet, Dr. Louis Malieckal in his article recommends '*Samdhyā* as a time to pray and a prayer of time'. Finally on this subject we present a meditative vision of our cosmos by Dr. V.F. Vineeth under the title "Cosmos and Contemplation". The artist Joy Elemkunnapuzha has enriched these meditations on five elements with suitable sketches. We hope that the readers will find the contributions enriching, enlightening and rewarding.

V. Francis Vineeth
Associate Editor