

What is in a Prayer?

What is required in order to know oneself as complete, free from a sense of inadequacy, *moksha*? Grace – a lot of grace. Before one even comes to the pursuit the need for grace begins. To be born in a human body and have a desire for *moksha* is due to grace. It doesn't stop there. Grace is further needed for bringing one to a qualified teacher, assisting in removing all *pratibandhas*, obstacles, that could distract the seeker from the pursuit as well as for *adhikaratvam*, the preparedness necessary for knowledge and assimilation.

The grace is available, but it has to be tapped and the best way to do that is through prayer. As Pujya Swamiji points out, there is no doubt that every student of Vedanta has, either in this or a previous life, prayed for *moksha*. When one makes the choice and prays to know the very truth of oneself the grace flows.

How does grace manifest? Grace is like an antidote for *karma* that is unfolding. All around us in the transactional world, *vyavahara*, we see order. Without order, seen as cause and effect, it would not be possible to study physics, biology, chemistry, geology and psychology, to name a few. There is also the order of *karma*, the relationship between actions of *jivas* and the results of those actions. For the *jiva* the order of *karma* seems somewhat unpredictable. Who does not have experiences of unplanned and unexpected events occurring? However, from *Ishvara's*

point of view there is nothing unpredictable. *Ishvara* being the author of all order, including the order of *karma*, does not miss even the smallest detail. Each *jiva's* *karma* account is perfectly settled.

By tapping grace it is possible to ameliorate *karma* that is unfolding. A prayer said before participating in some sporting activity, might make the difference between some minor bruising and a broken arm. Might make a difference. The grace flowing from prayer provides no guarantee that *karma* causing uncomfortable, and therefore less desirable, situations will be prevented. The strength of the unfolding *karma*, the intention behind the *karma*, past *karmas*, and whether planned or reactive, are all taken into consideration by the *karmaphaladata*, the giver of results of actions, *Ishvara*. There is no way to establish how the law of *karma* works and, as Pujya Swamiji reminds us, it is completely pointless to try and figure out. The *pramana* for the law of *karma* is *shruti* and being such there is no other means of knowledge is available. *Shruti pramana* does tell about certain ritual *karmas* that can be done to gain specific results, such as the birth of a child, wealth, bringing of rain etc. However, on how *punya* and *papa* result from *karma*, the *shruti* remains silent. What is told is that prayer is an action, making it beyond doubt that there will be a result; in the order that is *Ishvara* there is no action without a result.

What is grace? Grace the ability to accept

the order of *Ishvara* in one's life. The more grace there is, there less stress there is! To accept *Ishvara* in life, one has to know *Ishvara*, for which the only *pramana* is *shruti*. One has to suspend all preconceived notions about the world, about reality, and about *Ishvara*. This suspension of erroneous thinking and beliefs is achieved by admitting one's helplessness. To admit helplessness, is to admit that one is not in control and if one is not in control, it necessarily means that something else is in control, or at the very least has an influence over the way things are. That influence is necessarily conscious, intelligent and all knowing – it is *Ishvara* - this is what *shruti pramaṇa* tells. Therefore, for the one who is striving to know the truth of what is, *Ishvara* becomes the altar for one's prayers. To the extent that one acknowledges *Ishvara* in one's life, there is a place for *Ishvara* to abide. There is no such thing as being in the driver's seat and accepting *Ishvara* at the same time. Acceptance of truth does not coexist with rejection of that very same truth.

Really speaking, it is by *Ishvara's* grace alone that anything occurs – not a single nanosecond goes by that is without *Ishvara's* grace. How to pray for that grace? One can say a general prayer, a “sprayer” as Pujya Swamiji calls it. However, as a student of Vedanta one has to be clear about what it is one is seeking. There must be a commitment to know every step of the way. The prayers found at the beginning of each *Upanishad* (generally all *Upanishads* of a given Veda will have the same beginning prayer) focus on what is most helpful for the students in gaining the knowledge. What are those areas where grace most needed for students of Vedanta? The prayer at the beginning of

Kenopanishad, which is in Sama Veda, beautifully answers this question for the student.

The student of Vedanta needs a healthy body. All the sense organs, and internal organs of the body, including the mind, must be functioning relatively well. If one cannot hear, how can one do *shravanam*? If the body is aching, one's focus will not be where it needs to be, because the mind has a tendency to remain fixed in the area where the discomfort is. Therefore, one invokes the grace of *Bhagavan* with *om*, and then begins the prayer: *apyayantu mamangani vakpranascaksuh srotramatho balamindriyani ca sarvaṅi*. Bless my limbs, speech, eyes and ears, along with all other organs, including memory, so that they not only function well, but also gain the strength which is necessary for this pursuit of *moksha*.

Having asked for grace to have the physical preparedness, the second sentence directs the student's focus to the teaching. *sarvam brahmaupanisadam*. Everything is *Brahman* as revealed in the *shastra*. Without *shastra* it cannot be understood that *Brahman* is everything – in fact, the statement reveals the knowledge for which *shastra* is *pramana*. What is this “everything”? *Brahman* is all that is manifest and all that is unmanifest. Saying this, there is nothing is left unaccounted for – including one's own-self. One must come to know this truth. It is only by knowing all that is here is nothing but *Brahman* that one can know oneself as whole.

Next the prayer turns to clearing the way for the pursuit itself. Manifesting *karma* can derail the pursuit. *Karma* may give rise to situations whereby study becomes difficult to continue. If the student's *pratibandhas* are

too strong, it may be that the student gives up on the study. Therefore the prayer, *maham brahma nirakuryam* - let me not negate this pursuit of knowledge.

ma ma brahma nirakarot. May I always be a receptacle for *Bhagavan's* grace. The grace may be pouring but because of some obstacle it is overlooked. The human orientation of relying on sense organ reporting and the conclusions reached which are based upon those perceptions can be a big obstacle. We know that this unquestioned reliance upon sensory perception does not always yield the truth. One only has to look as far as the daily report by the eyes that the sun rises on the Eastern horizon, travels across the sky and sets over the Western horizon. It is well known that this so called rising and setting of the sun is due to the earth orbiting around the sun, not the sun circling the earth as suggested by perception. Likewise, the conclusion based on sensory perception that 'I' ends where the skin stops, the body-mind-sense complex, is other than I, is equally erroneous. How can this be said? *Shastra pramana*, which tells there is one undivided truth that necessarily includes you.

The request for the grace to sustain the pursuit is important as is repeated again in the next sentence. *anirakaranamastvanirakaranam me astu*. One may come to the study with gusto, much like a can of fizzy drink that when first opened bubbles wildly. After a while one can loose enthusiasm for any number of reasons and, like the once fizzy drink, become "flat" with regards to the pursuit. It could be that the progression of the

pursuit does not live up to some preconceived notions about *moksha*, or that one needs to exhaust more *karma* before being able to stay with the pursuit. One prays, therefore, for the grace to sustain the pursuit until the truth that one already is what one is seeking, that is *Brahman*, is fully known.

Finally one needs to be prepared. How does one prepare for such knowledge? *tadatmani nirate ya upanishatsu dharmaste mayi santu, te mayi santu*. The final line of the prayer is a request that all the qualities necessary to be an *adhikari* be present in the one who is committed to the pursuit. The word *dharma*, refers to the qualities of *sama*, inner resolution, *dama*, discipline over the sense pursuits, *uparati*, letting go of external crutches, *titiksa*, dropping complaining, and *samadhana*, meaning the ability to stay focused. It also includes *shraddha* in the teacher and the *pramana*. *Shraddha* is often translated as, faith pending understanding, but is more than this. *Shraddha* increases as the doubts decrease due to growing clarity in understanding. Faith on the other hand, being merely a belief, has no room for growth and is always subject to doubts.

The prayer concludes, as does every Vedic prayer, with a final request to be free from the three sources of obstacles by chanting: *shanti, shanti, shanti*. May there be freedom from obstacles in the form of *adhidaivika*, over which I have no control, *adhibhautika*, from sources over which I have no immediate control, and *adhyatmika*, myself.

May prayer bring the grace necessary for all your pursuits.

By Julie Carpenter



OM NAMO NARAYANAYA

ARSHA VIDYA PITHAM
Swami Dayananda Ashram, Rishikesh

is pleased to announce a

1 Year Residential Course
at the Ashram in Rishikesh on
Vedanta and Sanskrit
starting from
April 14th, 2013

Application form can be downloaded here
which can be filled up and sent through email to
dayas1088@gmail.com

Swami Dayananda Ashram, Purani Jhadi,
Muni-Ke-Reti-249137,
Tehri Garhwal, (Uttarakhand), India
Phone: 0135-2430769/ 2431769

Texts like Gita, 2-3 Upanisads and
a few vedantic treatises shall be covered.
There will also be a Yoga class, Meditation,
Chanting and Sanskrit sessions
everyday.