

Prayer—A Sheer Necessity.

(By Mahatma M. K. Gandhi.)

Prayer has saved my life. Without it I should have been a lunatic long ago. I have had my share of the bitterest public and private experiences. They threw me into temporary despair. If I was able to get rid of that despair, it was because of prayer. Prayer has not been a part of my life as truth has been. Prayer came out of sheer necessity. I found myself in a plight where I could not possibly be happy without prayer. 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 religious services in South Africa; but they failed to grip me. My Christian friends supplicated God, but I could not do so. I failed grievously. I started with a disbelief in God and prayer. And until at a late stage in life I did not feel anything like a void in life. At that state I felt that as food was indispensable to 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.

Teachers of the World.

Three of the greatest teachers of the world, Buddha, Jesus and Mohammed, have left unimpeachable testimony that they found illumination through prayer and could not possibly live without it. Millions of Christians, Hindus and Musalmans find their only

solace in life in prayer. Either you vote them down as liars, or as self-deluded people. 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 dare 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 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.

It is beyond my power to induce^d in you a belief in God. There are certain things which are self-proved and certain things which are not proved at all. The existence of God is like a geometrical axiom. It may be beyond our heart's grasp. I shall not talk of an intellectual grasp. Intellectual attempts are more or less fallacious, 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 various 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 child-like 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.

The Faith.

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. I say, we are less than atoms because the atom obeys the law of its being, whereas we, in the insolence, deny the law of nature.

But I have no argument to address to those who have no faith.

Once you accept the presence of God, the necessity of prayer is inescapable.

Let us not make the astounding claim that our whole life is a prayer, and that therefore we need not sit down at any particular hour to pray.

Even men who were all the 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 upon the oath, but we must renew our pledge every day. I assure you we shall then be free from every imaginable misery in life. (*The Cultural World*)