

# HOW TO PRAY

**New Year Lecture by Swami Paramarthananda**

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## How to Pray

*sadāsiva samārambhām sankarāchārya madhyamām  
asmad āchārya paryantām vande guru paramparām*

We have got many New Years in India - English New Year, Tamil New Year, Malayalam, Kannada, Telugu etc. That we have got many New Years itself indicates that the New Year is a relative idea. We need not be too much bothered about any particular New Year. Any New Year is O.K.

The purpose of having a New Year function in our tradition is just to take stock of our life and also see what is happening to our life. Because *mahatā punya panyēna krītēyam kāyanau stwayā pāram dukhō dadhēr gantum tarayāvanna bhidhyate*. You have a got human life because you have paid a very big prize for that in the form of lot of Punyam.

*mahatā punya panyēna* – *Panyam* means currency. By paying the special currency called Punyam which is much more valuable than the Dollars and Rubles and Dinars, we have somehow got the physical body to accomplish the greatest. *pāram dukhō dadhēr gantum tarayāvanna bhidhyate* -

So before losing this opportunity, accomplish the highest that can be accomplished. Therefore, we have to remind this particular thing off and on or the life can become mechanical. Therefore just see whether we are growing or not.

We are not bothered about the rate of growth, we are not bothered about the pace of growth, we are only bothered about the fact that we should be growing. Just as different plants got different rates of growth. We all have got our own pace. They say that bamboo is the plant or a type of grass which has got the maximum growth of 30 cm a day or so.

But all the plants and trees are not going to grow in the same pace. It is inbuilt in the system. Similarly, we all have got different rates of growth. Therefore, we are not going to compare ourselves with others, we are not going to develop a complex and we are not going to become jealous.

But we are going to make sure that we are growing in our own pace. That is the goal of life. Physical growth, Emotional growth, Intellectual growth or Spiritual growth at all levels. We make sure that we do not feel guilty or frustrated or we don't develop an inferiority complex. We keep growing.

When we decide to grow, avoid stagnation and going back. You know that we require the support of Ēshwara Anugraha also even though our effort is very important. The grace of the Lord also is equally important. So we generally tend to go to one extreme. There are some people who attribute everything to the Lord.

The fatalistic people say that everything is God's will and nothing is in our hands. We are simple puppets. They never take responsibility for their life. That is an irresponsible approach. It is not devotion. In the name of devotion and the Sharanāgati, we cannot behave irresponsibly. The Lord condemns in the Gita - *uddharēt ātmanātmānam*.

At the same time, we cannot be too arrogant claiming that I can accomplish anything that I want. That also is dangerous because pride goes before a fall. *mākuru dhana jana yavvana garvam harati nimēshā kala sarvam*. One day one can be the CM and the other day one can be in prison also. We don't know.

Therefore, I cannot say that everything is in my hand and I cannot say nothing is in my hand. I should accept my role and I should accept the role of Ēshwara's grace also. Therefore, any New Year I celebrate, I

take responsibility for my future and I also seek the grace of the Lord through some kind of prayer or the other.

It can be in the form of Pūja, it can be in the form of visiting some temple or any such method. When we pray to the Lord, we should remember some rules of prayer. We cannot blindly pray for anything and everything. We can only pray for those things which are possible.

Even though Bhagawān is omnipotent, remember that Bhagawān also can fulfill only those prayers which will fall within the possible limit. Omnipotent does not mean that Bhagawān can do everything or anything. Especially, in the Puranās also, you will find that Rākshasās will be doing tapas and the Lord will appear (Brahma or Vishnu or Shiva).

Once the Lord appears and asks what Varam they want (in the standard format). And the standard prayer by the Rākshasās will be standard *shāga varam vendum*. That is the standard prayer. And Bhagawān has got the standard answer *ad tara mudiyād*. *Then, you may ask the question, if Bhagawān cannot fulfill all the wishes, how can he be called omnipotent?*

We say, you should know the definition of omnipotence. The definition of omnipotence is, one who can do everything that is possible. Therefore, if you ask impossible things, boons from the Lord, we are going to utterly fail in our prayers. And not only that, we will begin to doubt the very efficacy of prayer.

Through that, we may begin doubt the very existence of Ēshwara. Therefore, before we start our prayer we should know what the impossible things are so that we will not ask for wrong things. So that our expectations will be sane expectations and the sane expectation means there is no scope for disappointment.

So, some of the impossible things - there are many but some of them at least, we will be very clear about so that we don't live in fools' paradise. One thing in life is that as long as we live, we have to be active physically and mentally. Krishna says in the Bhagavad-Gita - *nahī kaschit kshanamapi jātu tishtati akarma krit.*

So, a person cannot remain free from duties or actions even for a second. Therefore, the body is meant to be active and the mind is meant to be active. When we learn in the scriptures that *aham akarta*, we should remember that freedom from activity is only for *Ātma*. We should never try to be out of activity. We can never afford to get bored with our duties and responsibilities.

Therefore, O Lord save me from these boring activities is a wrong prayer because even if you stop one set of duties, it will be replaced by some other duties. So, if I live alone without the presence of children around, I will have to take care of all my activities because children are not around.

To avoid this problem, if I decide to live with the children, I will get the partial responsibilities of the children. I should be ready to babysit the grand children. Therefore, if you are with the children, some of the activities will be there. If you are without children, some other activities will be there.

If you try to avoid both and settle in an Āshrama, Āshram duties will come. If you get out of everything and become a moving Sanyāsi then you will get the activities of every blessed person in the society. In fact, whole world will become your family.

Therefore, our prayer cannot be rest. We can never pray for rest in life. We have to be active till we breathe our last. We can only pray for freedom from boredom. O Lord, let me do any activity with a cheerful mind. Let me be inspired in whatever activity I am in.

It may be the most monotonous activity of putting the signature somewhere. It may be monotonous activity of cooking in the house. Any activity, let me be inspired, let me be free from boredom, let me enjoy the activity at physical and mental level. That prayer will work.

Let me free myself from activity is an impossible prayer. Now the second impossibility is this - the future is never under my control. I can never control the future whether it is my own future, whether it is future of my children, or whether it is the future of my company, or whether it is the future of the world in general, I have no control over the future.

Therefore, any prayer in which I indicate that control, that is going to be a wrong prayer. If I say, let me have success all the time. When I am seeking success all the time, indirectly I am hoping to control the future. Let me have profit all the time - indirectly I am seeking control over the future.

Let my children get such and such, I am indirectly hoping to control their future. Therefore, any type of prayer in which I am indicating some kind of control over the future is going to miserably fail. Because the law or the rule is, I cannot control the future. The only possible thing is that I can contribute to the future.

Therefore I don't want to be a controller but I want to be a contributor to the growth of the children, a contributor for my own financial or family well being, a contributor to the national well being. I can only pray for maximum contribution on my part.

Therefore, let me not include in my prayer anything, in which I hope to control the future. It will be utter disappointment and failure. When I contribute, I can learn to do that contribution with cheerfulness and enthusiasm. I enthusiastically contribute without hoping to control.

Krishna also, even though he was Bhagawān, he could not control the force of Mahabharata. His contribution was the maximum but even

though Krishna wanted to control many things, he could not stop the very war itself. He could not stop the destruction. When avatārams could not do that, we small flies, what are we hoping to control!

Therefore, it is a ridiculous prayer. Therefore, O Lord, let me contribute my best and let me enjoy that contribution. That is why I said the first prayer is - whatever I do let me have cheerfulness and enthusiasm. This Bhagawān happily fulfill.

The third impossible – It is very important especially, for family people or any person who is living with others. I cannot change another person. I cannot change any person in the world. Even Lord has failed in changing Duryodhana; Rama failed trying to change Rāvana.

So, when Bhagawāns and Avatāras have failed in changing, if I hope to change, improve other people, I am going to be utterly frustrated. My life is going to be a burden, a Mahā misery. But that does not again mean that I should be an irresponsible person not bothering about others.

We may be parents and the children or dependent on us, therefore what we say is, instead of struggling to change others, there also I hope to contribute my maximum for the others' growth. I can have my life and language in such a way that it will influence the other person positively.

I influence others in two ways. One is my life and more importantly my language (what I speak). Therefore, as a parent, as a boss, as a ruler, whatever higher position I have, I can only contribute through my life and language for the growth of other person. I can influence, I can inspire.

And if the other person wants help from me, if and when he wants I can help also. If I hope to change the other person, it is going to be frustration. First of all, we do not know whether the other person

requires change or not. A husband and wife went to the doctor with insomnia problem.

Husband was not able to sleep. And therefore, both of them went to the doctor and the doctor gave a pill. The wife asked when I should give this pill to the husband (twice or thrice). He said, you have to take it. Husband doesn't have any problem. If you stop nagging and creating problem, he can happily sleep.

So, the wives don't mistake me, it can be the other way also. I read the joke in this manner therefore, I repeated. The joke can be the other way round also. Now the question is who is to decide who requires the change. *I always study other people subjectively and how do I know my Judgment is the right Judgment?*

Every one requires growth. I also require growth and the other person also requires. I do not know what type of change is required. Often, we find in every family that while one member is expecting change from the other member, the other member is equally, strongly expecting change from this member.

Therefore, there is a constant struggle. Each one manipulating and it is only a chain reaction and there is a total disharmony. Therefore, I have to decide to change. And when I decide to change, I can seek help from others and when the other person decides to change, and if he wants help, I can give.

But I can influence others through my life and my language. Therefore the third prayer is - not O Lord, improve the other people but O Lord let me contribute to others' growth. Let me influence other people positively so that it will help in the growth of others, in the maturity of others.

I use the word influence because sometimes, the influence is indirect. You cannot verbally influence the others. In fact, most people you



cannot influence verbally because nobody listens. The most difficult thing in the creation is listening. We think that when we are talking, the other person listening.

In fact, when we are talking, the other person is planning his reply. If you really very carefully observe, you can find that the other person is planning his reply. *And when he is replying, do you think that you are listening?* You are planning your counter reply. That is called argument, that is called quarrel and that is called disharmony, nothing happens.

Therefore, only when the other person wants to listen, I can help through language. If the other person doesn't want to listen, my influence has to be only indirect and the indirect influence is my own living. We can pray, O Lord give me the strength to put up with the non-changing people. That is a wonderful prayer that Bhagawān can fulfill.

And remember, whenever I am saying that I should be able to put up with others, remember that the other person also requires Bhagawān's help to put up with us. Because when we say, I should be able to put up with other people, we have got a sense that they are useless people and I am only great and I have to put up.

Remember that everybody has to put up with everybody's weakness. Therefore O Lord, give me the strength to accept the future. Give me the strength to live harmoniously with those people who are changing or who are changing for the worse, or who are changing for the better or who refuse the change. This is the third impossible.

Then the next impossible is, we can never get total satisfaction and security through any set up. No set up in life, even the best set up in life, can ever give total satisfaction and security. Therefore, as long as we are looking for the ideal set up in which I will be totally satisfied with zero complaints and total security with no insecurity, if you are looking for that set up, we are going to miserably fail.

Even if such a set up is there, that set up is not going to remain the same all the time. Any set up can get upset. When the set up becomes ulta (upside down) we become upset. And even if the set up does not change, we are worried.

When set up is fine we can never enjoy because we are all the time worried - husband is nice, wife is nice, total harmony, and children are gems, one male and one female, correct in the gap also, good salary, number of cars, a few houses extra also. We are worried that it might catch some Drushti.

Therefore, there is no ideal set up and even if there is ideal set up, it is not permanent. Even if you going to be there for long time, we will just we worried about its loss. Therefore, security and satisfaction O Lord let me discover in myself whatever may be the set up.

O Lord, give me that strength or that wisdom to discover security and satisfaction with any set up that is available. In fact, if we complain that the set up is not fine, I tell you even Bhagawān can complain about the set up. In fact, most dissatisfied person must be Bhagawān.

In his order harmony is there, he has created human being, and he has also taught us what is Dharma and we are busy violating every law of the Lord. If Bhagawān had to complain, I tell you Bhagawān has to give the biggest complaint. The most dissatisfied person must be Bhagawān.

Therefore, Dayānanda Swāmiji used to tell - we all complain that nobody understands me. Bhagawān also has to make the same complaint that nobody understands me. Therefore O Lord, give me the wisdom to discover satisfaction and security within myself whatever be the set up that I have.

At the same time, as a responsible person, I will be contributing my best cheerfully, enthusiastically for the growth of myself, for the people around and for the nation. *Therefore, what are the four prayers now?*

Let me be cheerfully, enthusiastically active throughout enjoying whatever I do.

Secondly, let me contribute to the future and let me not hope to control the future. On the other hand, let me have strength to accept the future. The third prayer is, let me influence other people positively through my life and language but let me not hope to change the other people which depends upon so many unknown factors (the hidden variables).

The fourthly and finally, let me have the wisdom to discover satisfaction and security within myself whatever be the set up. If I have such prayers, Bhagawān will happily co-operate. If I have got foolish prayers, I will miserably fail and loose faith in prayer and faith in God also.

Therefore, let us have the prayer and with the grace of the Lord, let us grow and let us contribute our best to the surrounding. With these, I conclude and I wish you all a Happy New Year.

*Poornamadah Poornamidam Poornaath Poornam Udachyathe  
Poornasya Poornamaadaaya Poornameva Vasishyathe*

*Om shanti shanti shantihi*



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