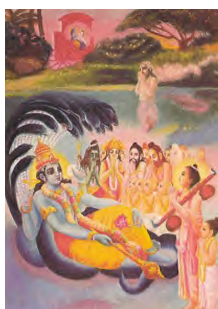


Nine Forms of Devotion

Vandanam Prayer & Prostration

The sixth step is Vandanam or prayer and prostration. Humble prostration with faith and reverence, before a form of God, or prostration to all beings knowing them to be forms of the One God, and getting absorbed in the Divine love of the Lord is termed as prostration to the Lord. Vandanam literally means ‘Salutations’, but it has various implications. It also means praising the Lord, offering our gratitude by way of prayer, and it indicates acceptance and appreciation of everything as His Grace.



Akrura, a devotee of Lord Krishna, is an illustrious example of a devotee who sanctified his life by constantly prostrating before the Lord and offering obeisance to Him with humility and purity. Vandanam does not mean merely holding the palms together and offering salutations. The two hands represent the five *Jnanendriyas* (sense organs) and the five *Karmendriyas* (organs of action). Vandanam means offering to the Lord all that the *Karmendriyas* and *Jnanendriyas* do, in a spirit of total surrender. Akrura worshipped the Lord in this spirit of total submission to the Divine Will. Hence he could get a vision of the Lord everywhere.

The joint hands also remind us of our true nature. The right palm indicates the Supreme, all-pervading consciousness that we call God – ‘Tat’ or ‘That’ from the Upanishads. The left palm indicates ‘Twam’ – ‘I’, the limited *Jeevatma*. It reminds us that the ultimate goal of all spiritual practices is the merging of the two – *Jeevatma* and *Paramatma*. “Tat Twam Asi” – That Thou Art, or I and He are one. How do we put this into practice? In the Bhagawad Gita, Lord Krishna says, “Aham Atma Gudakesha”. Baba explains this: “I am the inner Atma in the lotus heart of each and every being. So if you believe and direct your life on the basis of the belief that the inner Atma in every being is ‘My Paramatma’, that is enough dhyana for you. Stick to it steadily, practice that belief and apply it in your deeds, words and thoughts. Then the experience of Oneness, of your being Me and I being You, can be achieved.”

Vandanam also indicates acceptance of everyone and everything that comes our way as having been sent by Him. We are blessed with so much grace: our family, friends, society, a beautiful nature to sustain us and this temple of God, our very own body with which we enjoy this world. But we often take things for granted and forget to count our blessings. We must have firm faith in God and believe that whatever happens there is a reason behind it. Swami says, “Rejoice in all that happens for in every incident and accident of life, there is a meaning of My Mercy.”

Even in the difficult situations in life, God is ever merciful. His ways are mysterious. When Jesus was put through all that terrible torture, he did not blame anyone for his misery. He saw the Lord’s hand in everything that happened and took it all for his higher good. Because of this attitude Jesus was still able to love the people who harmed him. He felt they were only instrumental in handing to him his destiny. What came was not from them, only through them. It was from God, His Grace, and so how could he not accept it lovingly? He had laid down his all at His Feet. Such was the strength of his devotion.



Most of us generally associate prayer with asking God for something. But as explained by Swami’s well-known devotee and author Sri N. Kasthuri: “Prayer is an expression of our gratitude to God for all that He has blessed us with.” It may be a prayer like “Twameva mata cha pita...” from Hinduism; a prayer like “Tum Thakur tum pai ardaas...” from Sikhism; or a prayer like “Our Father

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who art in Heaven hallowed by Thy name, The kingdom come, Thy will be done...” from Christianity. All such prayers are just expressions of our gratitude and faith.

Such prayers help us to connect to the higher power, the all-powerful, all-pervading Lord. And when we connect to the Supreme Power we derive positive energy, we gain courage and confidence, and we rise above our limitations. Above all, we overcome qualities like pride, arrogance and egoism which cause all the negativity within us and make us miserable, agitated and unhappy in life.

When reciting the *Namavali* at the end of each name we say ‘Namaha’, e.g. “Om Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Babaya Namaha”. We must say it keeping in mind the meaning of the word as explained by Swami Himself. He says, ‘Namaha’ means *na-mama*, that is not mine, but thine. Same as in Christianity where it is said, ‘Thy will be done’ indicating surrender. Accepting everything as His Grace, praying to Him in gratitude, we offer our love and reverence as salutations to God. In so doing, we bow down to God.

Prostration is a traditional expression of worshipful surrender and adoration. In Hindu Temples, devotees bow down by falling absolutely flat on the ground in humble prostration in which hands, chest, forehead, knees and feet touch the ground (*Saashtanga Namaskaar*). This indicates total surrender at the feet of the Lord, body, mind and intellect.



The Muslim symbolises his submission to God by both kneeling and prostrating himself as part of the ritual during prayer. In the prostration position, the forehead, nose, hands, knees and toes all touch the ground. This prostration aptly sums up the Islamic idea of the relationship of humanity to God. The Qur’an states that nothing brings a human being closer to God than prostration in prayer.

Praising the omnipotent is not enough. Obedience to the laws of Nature, as also the dictates of justice and morality are equally important. To live a life of love and compassion is something that all people profess but few practice. The basic fact that all of us have come from one Source, the Divine, is often ignored or forgotten in the complexities of modern life. Hence ‘Back to Basics’ is the best prayer we may offer the Absolute.

The Bhagavatam says, “The sky, air, fire, water, earth, stars, planets, trees, rivers, seas and all living beings constitute the body of the Lord. The devotee should bow before everything with absolute devotion, thinking that he is bowing before God Himself. Through devout prayer and prostration to God the ego is effaced out completely. The Divine Grace descends upon the devotee and man becomes God.”

At the Bal Vikas conference in Prashanthi Nilayam in 2001, Swami declared that He was not going to allow padanamaskar to anyone anymore. He explained that He wanted His devotees to see Him in one and all. He said that the namaskar we want to offer Him, we should offer to our parents, elders, gurus etc. He said, “See me in your heart and in the heart of everyone you meet.” That is the ultimate goal of all spiritual practices, to see and serve the Lord in all His creation.

Holding onto Him in love, we must use all our faculties wisely for serving others while performing our daily duties. Seeing and loving Him in one and all is true devotion. We must live our life as Swami says: “With hands in society and heads in forests.” Let that be our consistent prayer, a true Vandanam.