

# PRAYER IN THE LIFE OF A SIKH

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## INTRODUCTION

Prayer is a human practice. As far as we know, lower species are not yet developed enough consciousness to pray. To a human practitioner, this is a special gift. To them the resulting awe is far greater than any one could imagine. This awe is the source of faith and unconditional love that seem to perform miracles.

The sacred space for prayer is found in every culture and in every civilization as far back in history we can search. So much so that human beings of all ages seem to be born with an innate urge to pray. Through prayer, they connect with a higher source of love and energy whenever they need comfort or direction.

The power of prayer in the life of a Sikh is particularly noticeable universally. Sikhs recite a formal prayer as a part of their religious services jointly with the entire congregation. They join the congregation in melodious recitation along with other worshipers. Further, Sikhs recite silent prayers more often as a part of their daily life and continue to do so in their quieter moments.

I do not imply that Sikhism is the only religion stressing on prayer. Prayer is a spiritual practice that occurs millions of times each hour worldwide. It is estimated that 3-4 billion prayers are said each day intended for Almighty or some other higher entity.

Although religions are different, we can feel the sense of a common experience among all of them whenever we visit the prayer recitations from all varieties of religions. It may be Sikhism, Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, or Islam. We may visit them in diverse cultural milieu such as in Africa, China, India, Egypt, or North America. Everywhere we go we will discover the similar inner feelings and longings present in their prayer. Thus a tradition of prayer is the one similarity and a universal thread among all religions.

## PURPOSE

Many times, the prayer is simply a thanksgiving and gratitude. Other times, it is a concern for self and for family. Often, it is seeking of assistance in anticipation or healing, a longing for peace or a wish for greater wisdom, or some time for salvation and deliverance.

In ancient cultures the prayer was usually practiced as a way to ask for specific goals or special favors. Guru Nanak told us that this type of prayer may or may not be effective. Among his followers, there is emphasis to put aside all selfish desires so they can experience communion with God without hindrance from worldly egos. Further, who is there to tell God what to do when the creator knows all?

At this point, the remaining wish of Sikhs who pray is that God's will be done and they be blessed with sufficient strength to accept God's Will whenever the ordeals are faced. There is no better way to open up to the universal, loving, and creative energy that is available to human species.

Prayer then becomes more than a means to an end; it becomes a state of both humility and of awe at the same time. It manifests these virtues irrespective of whether we are engaged in washing a floor, distributing food, or composing a symphony at the time of the prayer.

## Countless Examples

There are many examples of personal lives that are positively affected by prayer. My long time friend, Manmohan Singh Kohli, is a born Sikh and was raised a Sikh. As the Sikh tradition goes, Mohan's father imprinted value of prayer in Mohan's mind right from the beginning during his growing up. His recent book [2], *Miracles of Ardaas*, (*Ardaas* = a prayer in the Western vocabulary) describes his story of how he made use of our traditional prayer as his spiritual tool to sooth his nerves during the ups and downs of his life.

Mohan's autobiography brings together an inspirational collection of events in the life of a Sikh friend with whom I spent my childhood and similar close moments in adult life. He describes events from his childhood ranging from his expeditions to Himalayas, his rise in his professional pursuits, and all other ups and downs in his family.

His experiences tell a personal story of miracles

wrought by his prayers, the personal experiences that make a prayer desirable for all circumstances, ages and traditions. In addition, it offers insight on the nature of prayer that will be meaningful for a serious seeker of all religions and philosophies.

*“Prayer of my parents for my birth was the first clue given to me for my task in my spiritual life. On their own, they felt unproductive in having a child, which took them to the famous Sikh place of pilgrimage, Gurdwara Sri Panja Sahib, now in Pakistan. They prayed for a child who would advance Guru’s mission in his mortal life and their wish was awarded. My second clue came later from their prayer at the same holy place for healing of their first-born child whom the physician had declared doomed to a terminal illness. Besides me, others had similar experiences with prayer at the same shrine.”*

Mohan’s experiences with those of others’ and those of in my own life are corroborated by many scientific experiments.

Some time ago, researchers in USA designed experiments to verify whether prayer had any efficacy in healing of the sick. They enrolled seriously ill patients in hospitals and divided them into experimental groups. While continued on medical treatment for a variety of illness, some were scheduled to be prayed for while others were not. The same best medical care was continued for patients of all groups during the experiment.

At the end of this experiment, it became evident that the patients in the prayed-for group made better recovery than those not prayed for. This result was all the more astonishing when it was discovered that the person doing the praying didn’t have to know the patient personally, or even to know their names. Similarly, the patients were not told that they were being prayed for. The researchers reported that recovery of surgery patients could be improved 50-100% by some one’s prayer (4).

Research similar to the one described above is corroborated in dozens of other similar experiments. For example, Larson described 83% positive results in psychiatry [3].

### **The Lesson**

The reality of prayer in Mohan’s life, my life, and life of many others is a striking illustration that there is a reachable place beyond every day life. It unfolds spirit of those mysteries that begin to make an impact. It strengthens a declared guiding principle of the John

Templeton Foundation [5] that what we know is vastly exceeded by what we do not know. Here, one cannot help surrender to the notion sung in the hymns of the Aad Guru Granth Sahib (AGGS) that there is a constant participation of the higher powers in life. Then, the guardianship of that power gives you a feeling of immeasurable strength.

As the famous doctor, Deepak Chopra [1] said, of all the clues God left for us to find Him, the greatest is the prayer. Here your brain and your deity are fused in order to invoke strength to see God’s Will happen. Thus, prayer is communion with the Divine, a universal and loving creative force (*Karta Purakh* in Sikh vocabulary) that prevails in a variety of ways for people around the world.

Thus, every experience of prayer seems to have a clue about the working of Divine; it is left to us to be on the lookout for those clues. Teachings of prayer in the Sikhs’ holy book, Aad Guru Granth Sahib, challenge us to be keen observers of mysteries around all our life.

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