

NON-VERBAL PRAYER EXERCISE

Communicating with God without Words

Aims of this Exercise:

- ✓ *To learn the non-verbal prayer method.*
- ✓ *To realize that we can pray and communicate with God without words, formulae and prayers recited by heart. .*
- ✓ *To realize that often enough 'prayers' may be a hindrance rather than a help to express our thoughts and feelings to God*
- ✓ *To realize that prayer mostly is a communication of feelings at the level of the heart, not so much at the level of ideas and concepts .*

Uses of this Exercise:

- ✓ *For personal prayer.*
- ✓ *For prayer sessions.*
- ✓ *At retreats and recollections*
- ✓ *Especially suitable as a morning prayer at events taking place in the countryside, like holidays, camps, picnics etc.*

Setting:

- ✓ *An open site like a garden, park, forest, sea beach, where participants may feel free to move alone by themselves, jump, sing, clap, shout etc. without inhibitions, nor disturbing others.*
- ✓ *Also when one or many may enjoy the facility of private rooms*

Target Audience.

All audiences. Those who may enjoy it most are children, youngsters and youth

Introductory Prayer.

- Quiet down. Relaxation and/or breathing exercises may help.
- Hymn singing.
- Petition: Lord, teach us to pray '(Lk 11/1 & Mt 6/5-8)

Introductory Thoughts for Personal Reflection or for an Input for a Group Exercise.

PRAYER AS COMMUNICATION

Communication:

- All of us, whether we are aware of it or not, have deep within us unexpressed ideas and feelings that are clamoring for expression.
- Consciously or unconsciously, we are craving to communicate them to others. They are the raw material of human communication.
- All men yearn to reach to others and to be reached by them.

- Communication is an attempt to break through the barriers of our material bodies and to reach out others' minds and hearts.
- We loathe living in isolation, imprisoned in our egos. We crave for companionship, sharing, understanding, acceptance, and friendship.
- To reach to others' minds and hearts, we have several means of communication: The most common consists of **articulate words**, what we call human language.
- Any language – English, Hindi, Chinese, whatever - is a conventional set of sounds and articulate words designed to express what is within us, and communicate it to our fellow human beings.
- Besides, language - *verbal communication*, - we have **non-verbal** means of communication, like:

Inarticulate sounds	Gestures	Dancing
Clapping of hands	Postures	Crying
Touches	Humming	Shouting
Sighs	Music	Whistling
Looks	Movements	Singing, etc.
- **Due to upbringing and custom, we have become very skilful in using the verbal means of communication; yet, because of disuse, social pressures, culture etc. we have practically forgotten the non-verbal ways of communicating.**
- Alas! The spoken language very often has become a hindrance to true and genuine communication.
- Many words have lost their luster and original meaning i.e., love, praise, joy, etc., while others are not able express what we want to communicate.
- **Unfortunately, sometimes, we use words**, not so much as means of communication, but rather **as ruses to cover up our true thoughts and feelings**.
- Too many words are an obstacle to communication. They cloud instead of expressing our thoughts and feelings.
- **Non-verbal communication is a much more direct, spontaneous and primeval means of communication than** words and more powerful **and better suited to express feelings and emotions.** e.g., a spontaneous clapping of hands tells us much more than words like 'I am happy. I liked it so much'.
- Mothers can perfectly understand what their babies tell them much before the babies can utter a single spoken word! For a young mother, the sighs, the cries and smiles of her baby are more eloquent than many words.

Prayer as communication

- Basically, prayer is communication with God.
- We want to express to God what we think and what we feel; how much we love Him and trust Him; how grateful we are, how sorry we feel or even how angry or disappointed we are with Him.
- Usually, we find it difficult to express and communicate to God the things mentioned above, by means of formulae and stereotyped words and sentences mostly composed by someone else –*This is what 'vocal prayers' are.*
- Often enough we find that even our words fail short of what we want to express to God.
- In such cases, non-verbal means of communication will likely be, more meaningful and expressive when we communicate with God in prayer.

- We can easily communicate with God through Gestures, Singing, Postures, Humming, Looks, Dancing, Sighs or Crying, etc.
- In the past, unfortunately, we have forgotten this vast repertoire of means of communication; thus our prayer life has become poorer.
- Our prayer life has been too formal, dry, stereotyped, dull, unimaginative, and common place!
- Contrariwise, whenever God communicates with us at prayer, **He does it non-verbally! God does not use human words or articulate languages to talk to us.**
- For instance, the twinges and pangs of our consciences are the means God uses to reach our minds and hearts when we displeased Him.
- God communicates to us through feelings, consolation and desolation, joy and sadness, inspirations and inner promptings, illuminations and spiritual insights.
- **This may explain why we find it hard to listen to God and discern His speech and communications to us.** We are not used to that type of divine language!
- **If we have to have spiritual discernment and understand God speaking to us, we have to get attuned to God speaking to us ‘in non-verbal language’.**

AN EXPERIENCE OF NON-VERBAL PRAYER

Instructions:

1. If you intend doing the exercise all alone by yourself follow the steps mentioned in the form below.
2. If you moderate a group, give to each participant a copy of the form and explain them how to go about it.
3. Make sure that the participants have with them paper and pen to write down their experiences.

Non Verbal Prayer Form

Step 1. Preparation: *(5 to 10 minutes)*

Go alone by yourself, to your private room, better still to a garden or to the forest or to any place where you can be all alone.

- ✓ Shed all inhibitions. Feel free as if you were a child again.
- ✓ Do away with formalisms, ‘artificial manners’ and ‘strait-jacket’ propriety. Be yourself
- ✓ Take a reasonably comfortable position: sitting down, reclining against a tree, lying down, etc.
- ✓ Relax for a while. Listen to the sounds around you or within you, such as the beating of your heart, your breathing, etc.

Do not think. Do not talk to God. Avoid all words.

- ✓ Just be quiet.. Feel comfortable with yourself
- ✓ Feel. One with nature, one with your environment.

Step 2. Praying Non-Verbally (15 to 20 minutes)

In the quiet and stillness of your room or of the place, try to become aware of your feelings towards God: e.g. happy, sad, grateful, afraid, guilty, sorry, distrustful, resentful, angry etc.

- ✓ If possible, find out the why and how.
- ✓ Stay with your feelings for a while.

Then, express to God without words how do you feel towards Him.

- ✓ Shouting, clapping, crying, laughing, gesticulating, postures, humming, looks, whistling, etc. will do. Do not be in a hurry.
- ✓ Stay on in each feeling of yours and in the way you express it until you feel satisfied.

Next, try to express to God without words the following feelings:

- ✓ Go slow one after the other, till you feel satisfied:

Thanksgiving	Love for others
Praise	Fear
Worship	Love for yourself
Appreciation	Self acceptance
Longing for God	Anxiety, if any
Self-surrender	Sorrow for wrongs done
Humility	Any other.

Step 3. Closing Down

Quiet down. Don't think don't talk. Be still.

Tune yourself to God's speaking to you.

- ✓ Is God telling you something?
- ✓ What is it?
- ✓ How does he communicate it to you?

Keep listening.

Step 4. Recording your Experience:

Write down the following points. (10 to 15 minutes)

1. What did I do during the exercise
2. What I felt
3. What I learnt
4. Any other point you would like to record

Step 5. Final Prayer.

Write down a 'verbal prayer' that translates and summarizes your experience of 'non-verbal' praying to God.

APPENDIX

In case you led a group through this exercise, you may call for a final Group Meeting to exchange impressions and close down with a common group prayer.

- ✓ Ask for a short feed back from the participants.
- ✓ They may ask you for any clarifications or questions they would like to make.
- ✓ End the exercise by praying all together 'non-verbally' expressing to God thanksgiving, praise, adoration and joy.
- ✓ End by a hymn or two.

