

The person who is blessed with this state of mind surrenders all their troubles to God and lives care-free. They feel confident that they can win all their battles, overcome all their difficulties with the aid of this mighty power. Those people who have attained this state pray like this, *"You are my father, You are my mother, You are my kith and kin, You are my protector everywhere. How can there be any fear or trouble for me? With your grace, I know You. You are my refuge. I am proud of You. There is none but you and everything is your play"* (SGGSJ, Guru Arjan Dev Ji).

5th Stage of Prayer

In this state, we are convinced that the All-intelligent power within us is far wiser and mightier than ourselves and that it is our sincere friend. This Power is our constant protector and helps us to grow and flourish. We find that our own cares and devices are mere obstacles in the way of this Power. We become carefree and sing: *"You are the refuge of all life, You take care of all. Sweet and supremely good is Your Will. This is Nanak's prayer"* (SGGSJ, Guru Nanak Dev Ji).

Even in moments of supreme crisis, we find this Power an unfailing friend and jubilantly sing, *"Supremely good is Your Will, You are Immortal, O Lord"* (SGGSJ, Guru Nanak Dev Ji).

At the end of this stage, we feel that our prayers are unnecessary because God is already conscious of all our feelings, which leads us to sing, *"You are present, wherever I look for You. This belief has grown in me. To whom am I to pray, You know every un-said thought, O Lord!"* (SGGSJ, Guru Arjan Dev Ji).

6th Stage of Prayer

In the final stage of prayer, the All-intelligent power is ever ready to fulfill our wishes. Even our slightest wish materializes, *"Whatever His saints conceive, He fulfils"* (SGGSJ, Guru Arjan Dev Ji).

"Wherever His servant seeks, God is there and appears by His servant's side. What the servant desires of his master is granted" (SGGSJ, Guru Arjan Dev Ji).

Having reached this stage, we rise above the stage of demands and we understand the philosophy of prayer. *"When by the grace of God, we achieve perfection, what can or will we ask for? Worldly treasures lie at our feet. The beggar becomes the master!"*

Where should we Pray?

Simran is the remembrance of God and it can be practiced at anywhere and at any time. But in the initial stages it is important to practice it in a secluded place, with a peaceful, tranquil mind. Some people reserve a special room in their house for Simran. Incense, flowers and perfumes can help to induce a spiritual urge and aura. As we make sufficient progress in the practice of Simran, it is immaterial where we remember God.

When should we Pray?

Early morning, between the hours of 3 a.m. and 6 a.m. is believed to be the best time for Simran. This period is also called the heavenly hour, because at this time our minds are easily attuned to God. The next best times are late morning and the evening.

In the last stage of prayer, Simran becomes our life. A break in Simran is, as the 10th Master said, *"tantamount to the agony of dwelling near the hole of a cobra"*.



www.ProjectNaad.com

Stages of Spiritual Development

Sikh Dharma

PROJECT NAAD
www.ProjectNaad.com

What is Prayer?

Prayer is a personal dialogue with God, and it may be of various kinds.

Why do People Pray?

- For fulfillment of physical, material or spiritual needs
- To seek God's help in hours of need i.e. in sickness and pain
- To thank God for God's gifts and boons and to seek their continuance
- Because some people believe that their fortune lies in resigning their will to the Will of God
- For the good and comfort of others.

Pre-requisites for Fruitful Prayer

- Have firm faith in God's existence and in His power to grant the prayer
- Love and reverence for God during prayer
- A pure and recipient heart

2 Types of Prayer

Congregational

This has been used exhaustively since the time of the Sikh Gurus. It has played a mighty role in sustaining the Sikh community. The daily community prayer encapsulates the history of the Sikh community and the importance of Sikh Identity, self-respect and sacrifice.

Individual

This can be elaborate like the prayer performed in a congregation or it can be short and spoken in our own words, according to our individual needs and feelings. This is very important in developing our own personal relationship with God.

6 Stages of Prayer

The Sikh holy book contains verses for people at all stages of spiritual development. This is why some verses make more sense to us than others. The following is a description of these different levels of development.

The 1st Stage of Prayer

This is the stage that most people fall within and here we tend to pray for material gains. This is

shown by the following verse in the Shri Guru Granth Sahib Ji, *"Hail, hail O Lord! You help your servants. I ask for pulse, flour and butter. I ask for decent clothes and shoes. I ask for a cow or a she-buffalo, I seek a fine Arab pony and a good wife"* (SGGSJ, Bhagat Dhanna).

The 2nd Stage of Prayer

As we progress spiritually, our aspirations, yearnings and prayers change. We obtain greater delight in spiritual advancement than in personal comfort. All worldly pleasures strike us as transient, fleeting and worthless. There is an urge from within which is saying, *"What shall I ask for? Nothing is permanent"* (SGGSJ, Bhagat Kabeer).

As a child grows into adulthood, it ceases to want toys and juvenile pleasures and pastimes, and develops an interest in things of higher value. Similarly, a spiritually advanced soul feels discontented with temporary, fleeting pleasures of the world. There is an inner desire for permanent comfort and joy and a prayer comes forth, *"I have in many lives deluded myself, eating, drinking, sporting and making merry. Now help me across the fearful sea, I seek God's shelter"* (SGGSJ, Guru Arjan Dev Ji).

Now begins a very difficult stage, because we have to shed our old convictions, old habits, old beliefs, and to assume new habits and a new way of life. This is difficult because on one side, our lower self tends to pull us towards evil and we feel as if there is no escape from the pleasures of flesh. And on the other, the voice of the soul inspires and promises new hope, new visions and glimpses of a new world full of bliss and charm. A saint at this stage in his life once said, *"I am neither here nor there. Although I am not affected by the attraction of the world, my wavering mind is not always centered on God. At times, the lower self dominates and at times I render service in a Gurdwara. I spend nights in reflection. Sometimes I do things that the meanest of mortals would not do, and other times there are flashes of saintly life. I am living a life of mental conflict"*.

In the words of Shaikh Farid, *"I am full of sins and yet people call me a saint! Heaven help me, because there is no other help"*.

3rd Stage of Prayer

When we pass the second stage, we find our lower self defeated. There is an indescribable feeling of ecstatic joy. The world looks beautiful and worth living in. Just as nature looks fresh and green after a shower, so do we, after our conquest of the sensual passions, find the universe pure, radiant and cheerful. We can achieve concentration in devotional worship and we also begin to feel at one with God.

The lower self is paralysed at this stage, but the strife is by no means entirely at an end. Now and then, all of a sudden, the old trends of the lower self repeat their attacks in our weak moments and will occasionally overpower us. At times, we will admit defeat, but as the lower self has lost its strength, it is easily overpowered.

The recitation of the Word and our humble, hearty prayers come to our rescue and the lower self is vanquished. Kabir visualized this state by saying, *"If you renounce your home and dwell in forests, living on roots. Still the passions will not loosen their hold on you. How evil is our lower self! How shall we be saved? How shall we swim across the dreadful world ocean? Preserve me, preserve me, O All-pervading Lord, I seek your shelter"* (SGGSJ, Bhagat Kabeer).

4th Stage of Prayer

Whereas before our lower self was once elusive, delusive and restless, it is finally in a habitual state of peace, poise and bliss. This is the soul's stage of Sahej. Out of Sahej, arises that mood of spiritual inebriation that is known as 'dying' in Gurbani. In this state we are ever full of living happiness. This is described in the following verse, *"Mother, I have found inexhaustible wealth, that is the Name of God. My mind has ceased to wander and is ever at rest"* (SGGSJ, Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji).

As our mind is balanced in this state, it feels that it is not abandoned as it once was. We begin to feel the presence of an All-powerful, All-intelligent Force. There are times when a mere touch of this Force gives birth to indescribable thrills of ecstasy. People in this stage no longer pray for personal comforts or worldly advancement.