



Readers' Forum



Why People Pray

In an era when man somewhat pompously thinks himself to be the master of his own fate, the question 'why pray?' may appear a trifle superfluous and redundant. It is a question that the aging tend to be able to answer best as the 'machoness' of youth gives way to the fear of imminent death, leading to a last-minute attempt to come to terms with what little life they have left. Often, at that stage, there is a lingering fear that it may be too little too late.

While the aged indeed may find good reason to pray, explaining its necessity to others can take some doing. Many years ago, in my brief college days, I read an essay by that excellent writer George Orwell entitled "Why I write" in which he endeavoured to enunciate the immense and intense satisfaction he gets from the craft of writing. The process of

expression and creativity is almost a catharsis, an outpouring of relief at having defined his innermost thoughts and emotions as ideas that readers will enjoy, debate and discuss.

The act of prayer is somewhat like that. Many learn to pray as children and pray all through life, but it is only after a certain age that they begin to understand why they pray. In carefree childhood, prayer is an act of incomprehensible compulsion, done because it has to be. In the wildness of youth, it recedes in frequency because one thinks one is still in control of life.

It is after the acquisition of a family with its myriad responsibilities that prayer assumes a whole new meaning. An humbling hallmark of maturity is the realisation that things were never really in your control, anyway. Whatever limited ability to control events and circumstances there comes ebbs with advancing age, and the realisation begins to dawn that you may have been wrong all along.

Everyone prays for a comfortable, misery-free life even though they themselves may be working at that very moment to make someone else's life as miserable as possible. Spiritualism is very often only intended to enhance materialism.

People pray to an unseen yet all-seeing God, to idols, trees and animals, to spirits and to their ancestors. They also pray to objects in space and to the elements. They pray in thousands of different languages. But pray they do, because no matter how rich or powerful they are, there is someone, somewhere who is richer, more powerful and more in control than them.

In the old days, people prayed because it was an intrinsic part of religion, which was close to their lives as a social and moral force. Today the politicisation of religion, the increased mud-slinging at each other's beliefs and, worst of all, violence in the name of religion is giving all religions a bad name.

The primary purpose of prayer in an increasingly erratic and insecure world is to appeal for things to



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get no worse than they already are and to help the one who is praying find the best route through the morass. At a time when global tempers are rising along with global temperatures, the world clearly needs an ice-pack.

Physical fitness fanatics will tell you that it is never too late to start an exercise regimen. Ditto for prayer. Spiritual fitness has many parallels to physical fitness, resulting in the same enhancement of self-esteem, posture and outlook towards life. It is only when the physically fit start throwing their weight around that it turns arrogant and ugly.

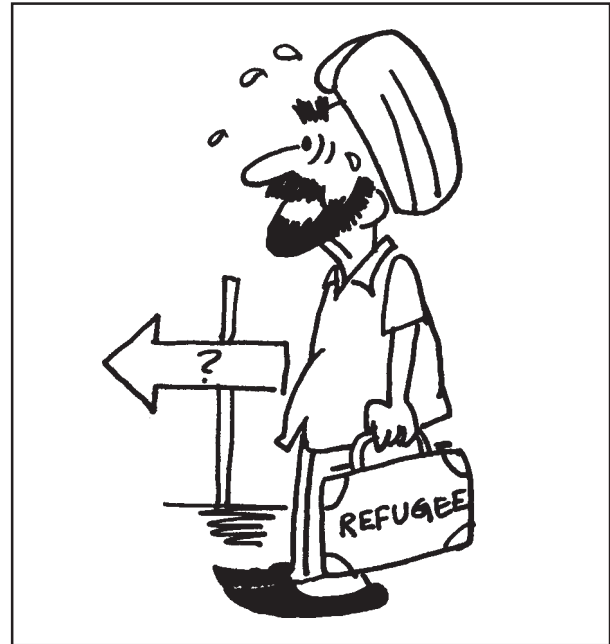
Rajesh Tiwari, received via e-mail.

Missing India

I miss Delhi a lot so I thought of writing to you. I do not know why I have completely stopped receiving copies of MANUSHI. I miss it. It makes me feel like I have no news from India. I am sure that you send MANUSHI, but I don't understand where it gets lost. Please find out if there is any problem in its dispatch.

All is not well here. At first glance, nothing appears wrong but from the media one hears only two words: crisis, serious crisis. And that socialism is getting popular again. There is nothing surprising about this. The standard of living is dropping, unemployment and inflation are increasing. Mills and factories are closing, small shopkeepers are going bankrupt.

The present government is perhaps better than the earlier one, but somewhat ineffectual. What is good is that one does not have to hear the westernised individualist nonsense: "Everyone look out only for yourself." I hate this. However, the government here often makes foolish moves which can be exploited. For example: for about 30-35 years now, maternity leave has been for 28 weeks. During this time, one gets 90 per cent of one's salary. From then on, till the child is four years old, leave can be taken with an allowance which is small but equal for everyone. Now this social democratic government has, without thinking, suggested that the leave be for only 14 weeks. The reason given is that after this period, leave with an allowance can be granted to the father if he wishes to look after the child. If they had to make an excuse, surely they could have found a better one. Seeing the protest against this proposal, they have now withdrawn it. Nothing will change. Ignoring the withdrawal of the proposal, the



communist newspapers carry on with propaganda articles about how mothers will be deprived of the privileges given to them under the former communist regime.

Lots of refugees still come here, I do not know with what hopes. Many come from India as well. Most come from Punjab, though most speak Hindi. I get a lot of calls to work as an interpreter in police stations. I often get phone calls from the police on weekends and have spent many nights there interpreting for our Czech police what the Indian illegal migrants have to say. These refugees are badly duped. They give hundreds of dollars, lose their passports, land up here and it is not sure whether or not they will get asylum.

Dagmar Markova, Praha, Czech Republic
(Translated from Hindi)

A lot of copies of Manushi do get lost on the way. However, whenever a subscriber informs us promptly about a missing issue, we make it a point to send a replacement copy, provided we are told which particular issue failed to reach.

For the last couple of years, due to a series of crises, our issues have been getting considerably delayed. We apologise for the inconvenience this causes to our readers. At the same time, we would like to assure you that the situation has improved considerably. We hope to stay closer to our publication schedules this year.

Editor □