

True prayer is a way of life

By Maulana Wahiduddin Khan

An old peasant was seated alone in the last pew of the village church. "What are you waiting for?" he was asked. "I am looking at Him and He is looking at me," he answered.

The peasant's answer expresses the essence of prayer. True prayer is an act of communication with an Invisible Being; it is to be aware of the omnipresence of God, and to submit to His infinite might; it is to realise that he is the source of all beauty, wisdom, truth and strength.

An act of this nature is not just performed at certain times; it is a state of consciousness which permeates one's whole being and manifests itself in all one's actions. If one's remembrance of God is confined to a place of worship, and not reproduced in everyday life, then one's prayer is not prayer at all, for it has not sprung from true remembrance of God.

How can one be humble before God and then go out and be proud before one's fellow human beings? How can one show exemplary self-discipline in one's execution of the postures and movements of prayer and then live as if one is bound by no code of conduct? How can one pledge oneself to service of God in prayer, and then serve nothing but one's own self and desires in real life? How can one be a picture of piety one moment and a barbarian for the rest of the time?

The truth is that inconsistency of this nature can only come from artificial prayer — prayer performed because it is the done thing rather than as a conscious expression of awareness of God. True prayer comes from remembrance of God, and one who remembers God cannot forget Him. True prayer is a way of life, and the truest way of life is literally a way of prayer.