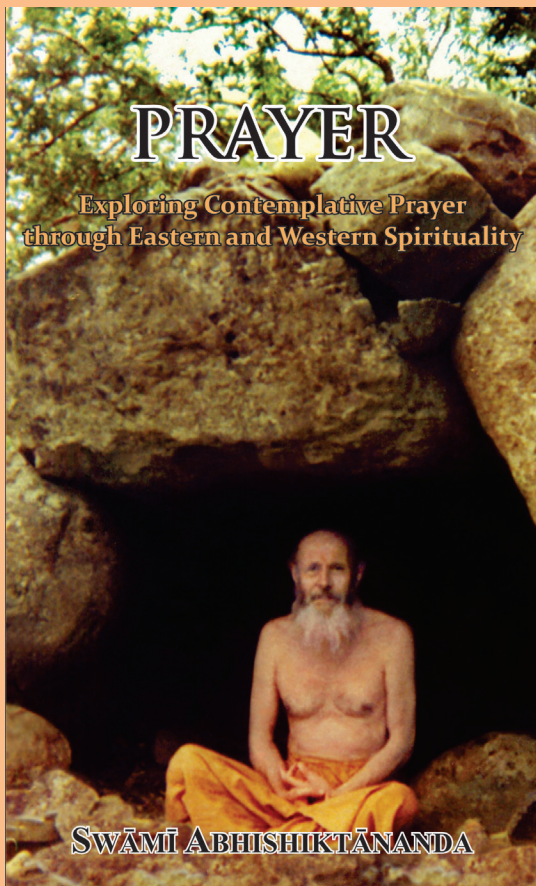


Swami Abhishiktananda, **PRAYER: EXPLORING CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER THROUGH EASTERN AND WESTERN SPIRITUALITY**, edit. by Swami Atmananda Udasin, foreworded by Rev. Dr. James Stuart, enlarged and revised edition, Delhi (ISPCK), 2015.



Prayer is the work of the French Benedictine monk Swami Abhishiktananda (Dom Henri Le Saux, OSB) whose encounter with Indian spirituality over a period of twenty-five years deepened and enriched his Christian faith beyond measure. The fruits of this profound spiritual experience are to be found in this treasured volume which is now republished.

It was once suggested to Swami Abhishiktananda by his friend (and later, translator and biographer), the Rev. James D.M. Stuart of the Brotherhood of the Ascended Christ (where he stayed many times when he was visiting Delhi), to write down his reflections on contemplative prayer in order to assist Christians with their inner spiritual renewal. By the end of 1965 Swami Abhishiktananda had completed an essay in English, which turned out to be his only published work to be written directly in English. Later on, between 1966

and 1967, he spent a lot of time in Delhi revising this manuscript, trying to improve the style and language with the help of Rev. Stuart and other friends. It was a taxing task but eventually this wondrous small book, which was eventually to be titled '*Prayer*', was published in 1967 by ISPCK (Delhi).

The book soon became known in the West when it was published in London by SPCK in 1972. It proved to be Swami Abhishiktananda's most widely known and popular work, and subsequently has been published in several other languages and reprinted many times.

As the Swami wrote in his Preface,

The book was written beside the Ganges in very close contact with the spiritual experience of the Upanishads In [it] there is nothing technical. It seeks rather to be a travelling companion on the road that leads *within* [1].

Like most of his books, *Prayer* was written predominantly for a Christian audience, with the intent of sharing his deep insights and contemplative experience, which were enriched by both his own Christian tradition and his deep immersion into Hindu spirituality. As he mentioned to a friend:

Even though it is very elementary, to those who understand it conveys many things. Its essential aim was to help Christians to understand something of the Real in terms that they could grasp. I would have written it differently, if it had been addressed to Hindus [2].

Having been himself inspired by both Western and Eastern spiritual traditions, Swami Abhishiktananda has greatly contributed to interreligious dialogue by highlighting the fact that Spirituality is essentially one and universal, beyond concepts and techniques. In this regard, *Prayer* is particularly valuable because, after considering various approaches of prayer, he magnificently emphasizes that in its highest form, it is a state of being and a constant contemplation of God's Presence:

May [this book] awaken people to real prayer, that of silence in the heart...Life is so good, despite everything, when you are awakened in the depth of the heart. And as for the circumstances of our life, whatever they may be, they are only the outward manifestation of the unique Presence [3].

By the end of 1969, while in Gyansu (Uttarkashi), Swami Abhishiktananda immersed himself in the French translation of *Prayer*. He added a new chapter in the French edition, which he titled *Le chrétien en vérité* [4]. In adding this final chapter, his aim was to:

... express in clear and non-symbolic terms the charge of high explosive contained in ... [*Prayer*], demythologizing the language used throughout the book, and pointing to the experience of Sri Ramana Maharshi and [the great *rishi*] Yajnavalkya [whose teachings are recorded in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*] in all its purity [5].

Eventually, the extended and more easily written (his native language) French version of *Prayer*, titled *Eveil à soi—éveil à Dieu: essai sur la prière*, was published in 1971 (Paris, Le Centurion). In 1971, Swami Abhishiktananda commenced working on an extensive revision of *Prayer*, based on the original French version. This task, however, was never completed and it was not until many years later that Rev. James Stuart translated this latter French version of *Prayer* back to English. The 1989 edition of *Prayer*, published by ISPCK, is thus a direct translation into English of *Éveil à soi—éveil à Dieu*.

A simple and practical handbook resplendent with the gems of Christian and Hindu wisdom, *Prayer* has rightly been acclaimed a classic and can be compared to similar works authored by contemporary Christian mystics who have explored contemplative prayer through Eastern and Western Spirituality, namely: Anthony de Mello, Hugo Enomiya-Lassalle, Bede Griffiths, William Johnston, Thomas Keating, John Main, Thomas Merton, Vincent Shigeto Oshida, Ama Samy, David Steindl-Rast, Vandana Mataji and many more pioneers in interreligious spiritual understanding.

(Excerpts from the Editor's Note)

[1] See p. xxii.

[2] Letter to Odette Baumer-Despeigne (March 8, 1968), in J. Stuart, *Swami Abhishiktananda: His Life Told through his Letters*, Delhi (ISPCK), 2000³, p. 198.

[3] Letter to Sr Marie-Thérèse (December 17, 1968), in J. Stuart, *op. cit.*, p. 208

[4] This additional essay was originally drafted in 1960 as some notes written for the Carmel of Lisieux (France). It was later translated from French by Mary Rogers and further modified by Swami Abhishiktananda in 1972. Eventually, it was published in India as a separate booklet under the title *In Spirit and Truth*, Delhi (ISPCK), 1989.

[5] Letter to Raimon Panikkar (December 5, 1969), in J. Stuart, *op. cit.*, p. 222

New Edition:

This enlarged and revised edition of *Prayer* has been prepared by the Editorial Board of the **Abhishiktananda Centre for Interreligious Dialogue** (Delhi Brotherhood Society).

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The book is also available in hardcopy on all Amazon sites.

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The Secret of Arunachala: A Western Hermit at the Foot of Lord Shiva's Holy Mountain
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