

The Joy of Community Prayer

5 Guidelines for community prayer at Shree Peetha Nilaya.

Based on the teachings of a Russian Orthodox Saint and Sri Swami Vishwananda.

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Place community prayer over work.

Work is successful if God's blessing is upon it. Don't allow the urge to miss this or that Divine Service (established by the Ashram rule) tempt you because of a need to complete necessary work. Remember that any work cannot be successful if God's blessing is not upon it, and that blessing must be called down from Heaven. When the blessing has been sought, one hour takes the place of a whole day's labor; without the blessing everything falls apart.

Place community prayer over personal prayer.

Community prayer is stronger than personal prayer. Don't be tempted to yield to the artificially attractive idea of staying in your room while the others are going to Church/Temple, out of the wish to pray with a little more fervency in solitude. When there is community prayer everyone has to go there. Personal prayer everyone can do at anytime; to do it during community prayer is fruitless because one is breaking the first rule itself, the rule of obedience.

Mutual Love is stronger: 'Where two or three are gathered in My name', says the Lord, 'there am I in the midst of them', and where there is God, there is every spiritual good. In community prayer people forget about their own egoistical pride for themselves and are concentrating on the Divine.

Very often the mind tries to find excuses not to do it. The one who is at loss is the person having such thoughts.

It's better to set yourself a rule once and for all never to yield to such a thought.

Attend the full prayer.

Don't be tempted to indulge yourself in not coming to Church in the beginning of service or leaving before it is over.

Remember, each service is a complete unit and can provide its full benefit only in its entirety.

Be attentive, be present & participate.

One must go to church not inattentively, but as one should. Entering the Church/Temple, we must put on reverence like a garment, remembering to Whom we are coming and to Whom we intend to address our prayers. In this way, we won't be bored in Church/Temple, looking here and there and starting conversations, but also doing Kriyas, Japa, meditating (i.e. personal prayer), etc. and we won't be wishing that the service be over soon.

Instead, passing from one prayerful feeling to another and from one reverent thought to the next, we will be like those in a fragrant garden, moving from one group of flowers to another. Consequently, spiritual warmth, which is the fruit of attentive prayer, will fill our hearts with ineffable sweetness.

Using Church/Temple service as we should, we will gain, little by little, the main thing for which the visible Church/Temple is given to us – that is, continuous mental prayer to God in our heart, which makes of our heart a temple of God not built by human hands.

Be disciplined.

Change comes with discipline. Really want God, don't pretend, don't 'bluff' that you want Him. The one who comes to all the services without fail and listens to them as he should can easily attain the highest priceless spiritual goods. He doesn't have to add much to this labor of uninterrupted attendance at Church/Temple; but he must take care to preserve unextinguished the warmth of heart which is ignited in Church/Temple through preservation of attention, by which his soul is blessed in Church/Temple. Through these labors, the soul will be sanctified more and more with the blessed presence of God, which raises the mind to God and lifts the heart with delightful sighing: this, really, is uninterrupted prayer.