

***Bhāvanā: A Precursor to Understanding***  
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*Hey mind let's go to the banks of river Gaṅgā & Yamunā  
The sacred water of river Gaṅgā & Yamunā cools my body  
Meera says Hey Lord I rest at your lotus feet....*

Nowhere else in the world do you have an attitude like this towards a river. Perhaps if the Hudson had flowed in India, it would be equally respected, revered, and worshipped. The devout Hindu, though he may be in Bombay where there is no river, repeats this verse:

*Gaṅge ca yamune caiva godāvari sarasvati  
narmade sindhu kāveri jale'smin sannidhiṃ kuru*

O rivers Gaṅgā, Yamunā, Godāvarī, Sarasvatī, Narmadā, Sindhu,  
Kāverī, may you all be present in this water!

These are the main rivers in India: Gaṅgā, Yamunā, Godāvarī, Sarasvatī, Narmadā, Sindhu and Kāverī. Only the Sarasvatī has either dried up or it is a mystic river.

These main rivers are considered sacred. And the devotee says “*asmin jale sannidhiṃ kuru*”. May you take your presence in this tub of water, or bucket, or shower head if you have a shower. Gaṅgā is looked upon as *jñānam*, knowledge and Narmadā is *yoga*, power. *Sādhus* who seek knowledge are on the banks of the Gaṅgā. Those who seek *yoga* go to the Narmadā. And thus, all the rivers have some meaning and are considered sacred.

There is an anecdote. Once there was a big discussion on these main rivers. Someone asked, although all of these rivers are sacred for a Hindu, which is considered the most sacred. Everybody said Gaṅgā. There seemed

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to be no second opinion about it. Everybody said Gaṅgā. Then one fellow stood up and said, “Yamunā”. “Yamunā is the most sacred river”. Of course, this was highly disputed. But this one fellow would not back down. He kept insisting that Yamunā was the most sacred river. Finally, the king, hearing of the dispute, called all these people together and asked them to prove why Gaṅgā is the most sacred. Everyone agreed that Gaṅgā is the most sacred river because of the *purāṇas*, the stories we have associated with the Gaṅgā, and the sages who have lived upon its banks. For many reasons the Ganges was decided on as the most sacred.

Then this lone fellow stood again and said, “What was the question? The question was among all the rivers in India which is the most sacred. I said Yamunā because Yamunā was the river on the banks of which Lord Krishna grew up. He grew up there and played there, and the Yamunā became associated with his name. All rivers are sacred, but Yamunā is the most sacred because of Lord Krishna. He had taken a bath in that river and played on the banks. He is the cause for Yamunā being the most sacred”.

Then the king asked, “What about Gaṅgā? It came from the heaven, etc. It must also be considered most sacred”. This fellow answered, “You forgot the question. Among the rivers which is the most sacred? Who told you Gaṅgā is a river? Gaṅgā is not a river. Gaṅgā is *jñānam* – knowledge. It came from the head of the Lord. What comes from the head of the lord is only *jñānam*. Gaṅgā is not a river. It is *jñānam*, knowledge.”

This is how we look upon Gaṅgā. It is purely *bhāvanā*, an attitude that comes from seeing the lord, *Īśvara*, in everything. The whole Hindu religion is a religion of *bhāvanā*.

At one time I was living on the banks of the Gaṅgā. In those days there was nothing there but my small hut, and next to me one *sādhu* built another hut with his own hands. He was living there, just a few yards away, and he had some kind of an attitude. He was a *sādhu* all right, but he had his own attitude, and he created some nuisance by the Gaṅgā. Some devotees who had come all the way from Rajasthan were taking a bath and they complained to some elder *mahātma* there, “*Yeh sādhu easa karta hai*, and what is all this? We have come here, it is a sacred river, and how can he desecrate this river like this?”

Then the *mahātma* called him and said “Why did you do this?” The *sādhu* said “Oh this is just water so why not?” The *mahātma* said, “Yes it is water. Who says water is not there? But for those people who come from all over India, for them it is not water. Not that they don’t see water. For them too it is water. That’s why they get in and take a bath. They don’t think it is mud or anything. For them also it is water. And for us also it is all water. But they see something more than water. Who is greater then? You don’t see more than water. Ordinary people who are not *sādhus* who are just devotees just simple people from all over the country, they come here to see this water. Do they come here to see water? They don’t see just water. Who is greater? Are you greater or are they greater?”

The *sādhu* said, “They’re all fools”.

But they are not fools. They still see water. If they don’t see water then you can call them fools. If they don’t see it as water then there is something wrong. But they see something more, they see some sanctity there. To have that heart takes ages. To look upon flowing water as

something sacred, and travel miles to see it, definitely takes a certain attitude. *Bhāvanā*.

That attitude comes from our concept of *Īśvara* – the Lord. The concept, the vision of *Īśvara*, is that there is nothing separate from *Īśvara*. There is a *mantra* that reveals this particular aspect of *Īśvara*. Everyday when we eat we are supposed to chant this mantra:

*brahmārpaṇaṃ brahma havirbrahmāgnau brahmaṇā hutam  
brahmaiva tena gantavyaṃ brahmakarmasamādhinā*

The means of offering is *Brahman*. The oblation is *Brahman*, offered by *Brahman* into the fire, which is *Brahman*. *Brahman* indeed is to be reached by one who sees everything as *Brahman*. (Bhagavad Gītā 4-24)

It means that nothing is separate from *Brahman* for the one who has the vision of *Brahman*. Therefore he doesn't lose the vision. Just like you don't require to make a special effort to recognize the space, because everything is in space. Objects happen to be in space. I see only a table, and don't take special notice that the table is in space. One who has the vision of *Brahman* is '*brahmakarmasamādhinā*'. The eater is *Brahman*. The fire is *Brahman*. The food is also *Brahman*. *Prāṇa* is *Brahman*. Therefore we also say, '*prāṇaya svāha, apānāya svāha, vyānāya svāha, udānāya svāha, samānāya svāha, brahmaṇe svāha.*' *Prāṇa* is respiration, *apāna* is exhalation, *vyāna* is circulation, *udāna* is the reversal process, *samāna* is digestion. Each one has got a certain sphere of activity in the metabolism, in the physiological functions. We just name each one. It is a crude way of naming, but then it covers everything. We are not concerned with the specifics of anatomy because it is religion. Anatomy is not important. It is only the attitude or, *bhāvanā*.

There is nothing that is separate from *Īśvara*, the Lord. *Brahman* means *jagat kāraṇam*, the cause of the entire creation. *Satyam, jñānam, anantam, brahma*. And that is the order. The Vedas say that space and time, *ākāśa* and *kāla*, come from *Brahman*. From space is, *vāyu*, the air. From air is fire, *agni*. Fire is nothing but *vāyu*. If you look into fire it is nothing but gas, and water also is nothing but *vāyu*. And the earth is nothing but particles really. Scientists know this now, but the Vedas were already telling us this all the time. Everything is reducible to one final cause. Everything is *param brahma Īśvara*. This is our vision, and from the vision comes *bhāvanā*.

This vision is very difficult for ordinary people to understand, but *bhāvanā* can be handed over. Therefore what do we get? *Bhāvanā*, which provides you with a framework for understanding this vision. You all have it but you have to recognize it. Hanumanji had a lot of power. But he didn't know it until Jambavan told him what he possessed in the form of power! Like Hanumanji, Indians who grow up in India have these things.

Suppose you happen to step on a book. Now what will you do? You will do *namaskār* to the book. So this is a symbol. This is purely an action, and this action is an important action because it is a form. You respect the knowledge with this action. After all, this is only a book. It is not knowledge or anything. An American – suppose he steps on a book. Or anybody. They don't care. They don't think they are disrespecting knowledge or anything. This is a very important thing to realize. When an American steps on a book he doesn't see his act as being disrespectful of knowledge. It is not that he doesn't respect knowledge. He has respect for knowledge. They have all these universities, etc. For you it is a problem.

Stepping on something, putting your foot on something, is an act of desecration. Kicking something is an act of desecration.

This following action is again cultural, and is associated with some sanctity. Suppose a flower is given as *prasād* then you touch it with your forehead and do *namaskāram*. There is a meaning to this. Maybe you don't know what the meaning is. But you're not required to know the meaning. If you know the meaning it is good. In America you're required to know the meaning. You're required to know the meaning because the children will ask. If you do *namaskāram* they will ask "What is this?" So you have to tell them the meaning. But because you were brought up in India and the whole society has this respect, and so it grows upon you -- mom did it, dad did it, everybody did it, you do it. And it is associated with sanctity. Indicating, symbolizing sanctity. Something very sacred.

And similarly, if you step on a rupee note – to an American a rupee note is nothing. Even though it may be worse than one-thirtieth of the value of a dollar, and has no value at all for you. You are a big man. And this one rupee note – what, who cares? It is nothing. Yet can you step on it? You cannot step on it. If you step on it then again you have to do *namaskāram*. Why? The rupee has no value for you. That one rupee is nothing. What is the big deal? If it is at least a thousand rupee or something then it may be a little bit. One rupee is absolutely nothing. But still you can't step on it because it is again something of value. You grow up with *bhāvanā*. This is what I say, *bhāvanā*. You don't know, but you have *bhāvanā*. You don't know what all of this is about but you have *bhāvanā*. Similarly, suppose you go to an old person, any fellow who is older than you, only one year older – you are required to do the *namaskār*. What is this? It is respect.

Suppose you are a PhD professor somewhere in Harvard. In India you missed out. You're not a Brahmin there but after coming here you became a "Boston Brahmin". And now you are such a big fellow and you got married and have an uncle from the village with all his *pān* in his mouth, but you have to go and touch his feet. Will you do it or not? You will do it. Why? Age. You respect age. It is a *bhāvanā*. You don't care whether he knows anything. It is not important. It is a *bhāvanā*.

Similarly, you've got a *pūjā* room, and in this *pūjā* room you have got a gallery of gods. How many are there? There are so many varieties of god. One with four hands, another with eight hands, another with twelve hands, and one is very fierce-looking, and one is very smiling. One with bow and arrows. No god is without weapons. This is another thing. Everyone has got a weapon. Sri Vishnu, he has got a *chakra*. Lord Rama has a bow and arrows. Sri Krishna also has a *gada* in his hand. Everybody has got one thing or the other. But you don't get confused do you? Do you get confused? Are you frightened? No. Why? And how much do you know about all of them? What do you know about all of them? What does the average Hindu know? They don't know. But even though he may not know all of it there is *bhāvanā*. That's what counts – *bhāvanā*.

You know there is a meaning there. You may not know the whole vision. But *bhāvanā* is there, only *bhāvanā*. That is what is important first. A mountain is looked upon as god. People do *yātra* to Kailash. And what is there at the end? A mountain. Mountain and snow. So there is nothing. You see snow and mountains everywhere. You go to the Rockies, everywhere you find snow. But this culture doesn't say that this is Kailash, etc. There is no Kailash. The mountain, it is just a mountain, and there is no

worship. But in India they worship a mountain and a river. Kurukshetra is a pond. In Kurukshetra every twelfth year there is a *mela*. And in that *mela* you take a bath in that pond. And the water naturally becomes very dirty. All these people getting a dip there. And people go, they don't care! Thousands, even today, thousands. What is *Kumba mela*? Nothing but taking a bath. All this is purely *bhāvanā*. What is that *bhāvanā*?

*Sarvam khalvaitam brahma*, all this is *Brahman* (Chāndogya Upaniṣad 3-14). That is *bhāvanā*. The whole of *bhāvanā* is based upon a vision, which we have to realize later. But the *bhāvanā* is *sarvam Īśvara*, everything is the lord. There is nothing profane. In our religion there is nothing secular. Money is sacred; *Lakshmi* provides it so you have to respect it. Then knowledge also is sacred. Knowledge is *Sarasvati*, and it means all knowledge is *Īśvara*. *Sarasvati* means married to *Īśvara*. All wealth is from *Lakshmi*. Wealth includes land and resources and gas also underneath. What else is wealth? Knowledge is wealth. Skill is wealth. Time is wealth. You may have knowledge and skill, but you have to use it in time. And therefore time is wealth. *Kāla*, and all resources, materials that are there, that is all wealth. Energy is wealth, matter is wealth. And therefore this wealth is *śrī*.

This is why we say *Bhagya Lakshmi*, *Dhānya Lakshmi*, *Dhana Lakshmi*, *Santāna Lakshmi*, *Soubhagya Lakshmi*, etc. Even children are wealth, *Santāna Lakshmi*. All these are *Lakshmi*. So what is secular, tell me? What is secular? There is nothing secular because everything is *Īśvara*. And so the rivers – because they bless, they all become *Īśvara*. The Himalayas, themselves are *Īśvara*. *Vāyu* is *Īśvara*. Air is *Īśvara*. The sun is *Īśvara*. The moon is *Īśvara*. And in some temples in India you will find the



nine planets, Jupiter, Mercury, Mars, Saturn, Venus, all of them *Īśvara*. They do *pūjā*, in fact, at the *navagrahas*. Whenever somebody is in trouble they will do *pūjā* there. And it is effective. *Īśvara*, I don't see anything that isn't *Īśvara*. Even *ākāśa*, space, is *Īśvara*. Death, the most frightening thing, is *Īśvara*! And we do *pūjā* to Lord Yama. So *bhāvanā* means that everything is sacred. Everything can be considered symbolic.

Gaṅgā is symbol for *jñānam*. Yamunā is symbol for devotion, *bhakti*. And Gaṅgā and Yamunā join in Allahabad. The pursuit of knowledge and devotion to that knowledge, devotion to the Lord, they both join there. A confluence is always sacred. The joining – the confluence – that confluence is a *bhagavān*. When two hearts see each other, there is a confluence of two hearts mixing and there is a certain growth there. There is *bhagavān* there. That's why love, they say, is one of the *svarūpas* of *bhagavān*. Then similarly here, suppose you are the *jīva* and the *Īśvara*, the individual who feels separate from everything else; when that separation goes away that is also called *mokṣa*. That is the final confluence.

The ocean water evaporates. It becomes vapors. And goes up and rains all over. Then the rivers all start flowing. In the process they bless as they flow, but they keep in mind always the ocean. And in the process they grow. They gather together. And then they bless, and reach the ocean. And the process continues. But the quality of water is the same. In one form or the other it is all the same. The process continues. The process is the beauty. Whole creation is a process. The cyclic process continues, and it has to be like that. Otherwise it can't stand, the creation can't stand. The earth has to be moving. Everything has to be moving. In the nucleus all the particles have to be spinning. Then only there is creation. That is why

*bhagavān* is always dancing. Movement. Always *ḍamaru*. That movement always. And so every confluence is worshipped in India.

In Benares the river takes two turns towards its own source. And when there are two turns towards the source, the land between them is called sacred. Like Benares, it turns towards the north, and again it turns towards the north, and in between the land is called sacred. That's why one side is sacred, and the opposite bank is not. Ramnagar is not. There it becomes south. Only from this side it is north. In that turn towards the north, there is sanctity.

We tend always to go away from the source. There is an inherent tendency for entropy, an in-built entropy. Always our efforts get dissipated. Dissipation that is called entropy. And if you use your will, and turn toward the source, then there is life. Then only there is life. Everything tends to disorder. You do not need to know hydrodynamics, but you can simply take the example of your own room. Okay, everyday you have to pull things out, books and etc. pulled out, dresses pulled out, and various things. Everyday you have to use things, and you don't put them back in their own place. You can understand. What is that – entropy, disorder. You have to put them back to order. In life it is also like that, put everything back to order.

And putting things back to order definitely takes some effort. The mind also has tendency to get into a state of disorder. And again you have to bring it back. That's what the whole life is. The only thing that keeps you from dissipation or disorder is going toward the source, and that is why a *sādhu* is respected – because he has set his life toward the source. He has set his life toward the source, or *Īśvara*.

This *bhāvanā* is due to vision. *Īśvara's* vision. That vision is what we have to gain. We are all going towards the same source. That is why nothing else satisfies us. Look at this – your ultimate goal was America. All right, you came to America. Then afterwards you have to study here and you have to find your niche and you have to get into some kind of profession. Then what is the aim? Green card. So green card you have got. And you have got a good job, and you have piled up some money also. Therefore you must simply be happy. Totally happy. Naturally, no? Why? Because the human heart is always looking for something more. But more will not solve the problem. What I have is not enough. That is the problem. Vedanta says, this is not enough, this you can never solve, unless things fall in their own place. There are two types of problems. One problem is that the solution lies outside the problem. Like hunger. The solution is outside the problem in the sense that food is outside of you. And you have to bring in the food. But there are problems where the solution is right in the problem itself. Like in a jigsaw puzzle. When the solution is also in the problem, things have to fall into their own place.

We have to know the whole before things fall into place. Only then it makes sense. Otherwise the various pieces are incongruous, seem to have no meaning. All those edges and look funny. But they are all meaningful.

In understanding the whole, even very painful experiences help you. Without pain you cannot understand. Suppose pain recognition is not there. It's possible. If pain recognition is not there how are you going to take care of this body? That is why pain is there. If something is wrong you go to the doctor and explain what is wrong.

Similarly, in life, all bitter experiences which cause pain to you, emotional pain, they're all bits and pieces to help you either grow or to come under. Any pain can either cause you to go under, or you have to become bigger than the pain. You have to change your cognition. To be bigger than pain means you have to look at situations in a wider sense. Then only it becomes smaller. To become bigger you must cognitively change. So your cognition, your scales of vision, should undergo a change. And when you look at the same thing from a wider perception, then the pain has no basis. Therefore pain makes you grow and all life's experiences become meaningful. That's why Shakespeare wrote a play and called it *All's Well That Ends Well*. In between there are a lot of things, but he called it *All's Well That Ends Well*. And so Vedanta, the *Gītā*, is nothing but life. It just brings things to fall in their place, and allows you to recognize the pain as a part of growth. It starts with simple *bhāvanā* and then makes the *bhāvanā* a reality. *Bhāvanā* grows upon you.