

Bonding With God

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All that is here is Īśvara, the Lord.

The fact is we have to relate to the world. It is unavoidable, and it need not be avoided. While relating, we are called upon to respond to different situations, and our responses can be objective and dispassionate. However unpleasant the situation is, we can respond without being stressed. But to be objective is easier said than done. To be objective takes a lot of understanding.

There is a psychological order in the behavior of a person. Like there is a physical order, a physiological order, a biological order, and an epistemological order, there is also a psychological order. Whether we know or we don't know why a person behaves the way he or she does, we can still understand that there is no other way possible for that person to behave at this time.

Every individual has his or her own background, and at any given time, they are doing their very best. We always worry and question, "Why did he do that? Why did he not do this?" But given the background, that person can behave only in the manner he does at this time and place. There is no other answer.

When we understand very intimately that all the significant people who bother us are behaving exactly as they can (there is no other way the person can behave), then there is no problem. And the fact is that anyone who bothers us is significant. Insignificant people do not bother us as much. Anything that exists in time (what is time-bound) both known and unknown, including our physical body, mind, and senses, constitutes the *jagat*. While the *jagat* is not independent of Īśvara, Īśvara is independent of the *jagat* because he can exist without the *jagat*.

The rule is that an effect is not independent of its material cause. The material cause, however, can exist without being a cause. The clay can exist without being a cup, but the cup cannot exist without being the material of which it is made. This is the same truth with reference to the Lord. He is both the maker and the material cause. Like in the dream, we are both the maker and the material cause.

The truth about the material cause is that it sustains the effect. In fact, there is no effect; it is just the material cause. We have this example of a simple pot and clay. The pot is not independent of its material.

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This is a very interesting thing: You are looking at the world, and in the world you want to have a vision of Īśvara. In fact, whatever you see right now is Īśvara. The seeing eyes are Īśvara, the seen object is Īśvara, and the seer is not separate from Īśvara. All that is here is Īśvara. If this is so, isn't it a foolish thing to locate the Lord in a particular place? God is called all-pervasive, almighty, and the cause of everything, and still he is located at a particular place.

All that is here is Īśvara, and Īśvara exists in a two-fold way: one way is in a manifest form that is available for our perception and interaction; the second way is as the unmanifest potentials that are Īśvara. Prayer is a special action that taps those potentials.

Prayer is the only act where our free will enjoys total freedom.

In all religious cultures, prayer is common. Prayer can be in any language and in any form. The Lord does not have a linguistic problem. He can be invoked in Hindi, Latin, Greek, French, Hebrew, English, or an Arabic language. This is not the same as saying all religions lead to the same goal. They do not! When I say all that is here is Īśvara, what is here you have to claim, and you claim that through prayer. If you do not claim it, then you are the loser.

All prayers are valid. Prayer is an action (*karma*) because it stems from you as a doer (*kartā*). Anything that stems from you, a doer, is called action. It comes from your free will. The human free will is difficult to define because we do not know which is free will and which is pressure. In all actions, some free will is involved. But more often than not we find we are in a corner where we are constrained to do an action. Therefore, we do not know how much freedom that free will enjoys. It is disputable.

There is always pressure, inner pressure and outer pressure. Outer pressure finally becomes inner pressure when somebody pressures you and you internalize that situation. If you refuse to get pressurized, there is no inner pressure; there is only outer pressure. The pressure is for the other person; it remains his agendum, not yours. When you internalize the other person's demands, it becomes your duty or your pressure; you feel you have to do it.

Due to pressure, one is constrained to do certain things. Even a reaching-out action like charity is sometimes done because of our own empathy. When we see somebody in pain, we pick up that pain. That is human nature. First, we empathize; then, in order to eliminate that empathy, we do something that sometimes becomes a reaching-out action. There again there is pressure that is empathy born.

Social service is empathy born. However, some people do social service with an agendum for converting people. For all the eyes that see the work, it looks like service; but the person has a certain plan, a program to convert the people to a different religion.

Therefore, that is not considered service. That is only a means for accomplishing an end. The means happens to be good, but the end is not good because a culture is being destroyed. It is not necessary.

Perhaps a person is really reaching out to help someone. Without receiving any monetary reward whatsoever, one does an action. However, nobody does anything without expecting some kind of a reward, and there is always some reward for anything that one does. Perhaps the person is getting rid of his or her empathy-born pain, or maybe the reward is discovering the joy in sharing. So even a reaching-out action is a pressurized action. One's own empathy pressures one into doing something.

Prayer is the only action where our free will enjoys total freedom. We need not pray. "But, Swamiji, it is a prayer in distress; I am in a difficult situation." But in distress you need not pray. In distress, you can hit your head on the wall. In pain and in distress, you can do a hundred different things. You can take alcohol; you can take drugs; you can go on a buying or killing spree. You need not pray. Why? Because you do not see an immediate result.

Prayer has two results. An immediate result and an unseen result. The unseen result of prayer is called *adr̥ṣṭa phala*. It will manifest in time and is what we call grace. It is produced by an action and accrues to the doer of the action, the one who prays. This is a potential, and the potential you tap. Like there is underground water that has to be brought out by a series of actions. So also prayer is an action tapping the potential grace. The immediate result of prayer is called *dr̥ṣṭa phala*. That you can pray is itself an immediate result. It is not easy to sit and pray.

A prayer can be said in simple words, or it can be an elaborate ritual, or it can be purely oral or purely mental. Prayer can be described as three different forms of action—physical (*kāyika*), oral (*vācika*), and mental (*mānasa*). A ritual is a physical form of prayer; singing in praise of the Lord is an oral form of prayer; and chanting a mantra silently is a mental form of prayer.

When we act, our intention becomes complete. When we want to wish somebody a happy birthday, we can just mentally think about that person and wish the person well and that is all. But when we take the time to choose a card, buy it, write something on it, and then post it, our wishes become totally manifest. When we act it out, our intention is fulfilled.

That is why we have a daily ritual as a form of worship. The ritual is performed at an altar where flowers, incense, and light are offered. This is purely cultural. Nobody worships an idol. People worship only the Lord, and the Lord being everything (there is nothing outside him) every form is the Lord's form. In any form that you recognize as Īśvara, you can invoke the Lord. It is purely invocation. When we invoke the Lord at an altar and offer worship, it is called *kāyikam karma*, which involves the physical limbs, the mind, and the organ of speech.

Oral prayer, *vācika karma*, is common in all religious traditions and is also there in the Vedic tradition. It involves the mind and the organ of speech. The same prayer can be mental, which is called *mānasa karma*, involving the mind alone. It is called meditation, a mental activity for which the object is *saguṇa Brahman*, *Īśvara*, the Lord.

We bond with *Īśvara* by doing actions that invoke the devotee in us.

While doing these prayers, we are producing an unseen result called *adṛṣṭa phalam*, which makes the difference between success and failure. It is called grace. But more than that, the devotee is invoked in us. We need to establish a bonding with *Īśvara*, a bonding that got snapped between our parents and us.

We started our life with complete trust in our parents. As we grew, we naturally took our mother and father to be infallible. That bonding that was there was with the almighty infallible, and our father and mother constituted that almighty infallible God. As a child, we did not have any other God except these two people.

Afterwards, when we discovered that our parents were not almighty but they were fallible, that trust faded. The infallible parents became fallible in the eyes of the child, and the bonding was snapped. Then all our lifetime we have been searching for the infallible. There is a longing to bond with a being we can trust. That bonding has to again be established.

This is an enlightened bonding. In the baby, it was an innocent bonding. Understand the difference. Here we have grown up in our life, and we understand what *Īśvara* is. The bonding that is established now is deliberate bonding by knowing, first, this is *Īśvara*, and then by doing such actions that establish that bonding, actions that will invoke the right person in us. A person who has that bonding will never have stress.

Suppose you are jealous of somebody with whom you have to live, and you want to remove this jealousy. Jealousy is the pain born in the wake of knowledge that somebody is happy when you are not. Once jealousy comes into the mind, it grows and the only cure for it (if at all there is one) is to do something. You have to act it out in the opposite way. Give the person a rose every day for forty days. Tell him, “I want to get rid of my jealousy, so please accept this rose.” When you are honest, people are different.

Your commitment to change is manifest in that action of giving a rose to that person to whom you would rather not give a rose. It takes a lot of commitment to change. Definitely, it is a deliberate action. Only by acting it out, as though you already have the quality you are seeking, do you change. You fake it till you make it. We do this all the time. How did you learn swimming? By faking it and making it. You have to enter into the water and swim. The swimming teacher tells you, “Come on, swim! Do the same thing as I do.” In the process, you learn swimming. You learn driving by driving. You learn cooking by cooking. You learn everything by doing it. There is no other way.

We have to establish bonding with Īśvara. Once that bonding with Īśvara is there, we can relax. As we saw before, when a child feels insecure and afraid because something like a cockroach is seen, it runs to its mother. Once it is standing near its mother, it feels safe because it trusts that the almighty, infallible mother can take care of it. The child feels powerful now.

Then that trust is eroded when the mother calls dad. The child thinks that dad is almighty and infallible, but then dad cannot handle the situation either. So from this the child quietly understands that they are fallible. First, a vague understanding is there. Then the clarity grows as the child grows. Afterwards, the bonding is gone. One has to become complete again.

As a child, we were together with our mother before birth, and that connection was snapped after delivery. Then we seek that bonding in life that can take place only with the infallible. That is why people love a religion that has a saviour. That is why those religions that have a saviour to offer have followers, and that is also why there is saviour psychology. Thus, all the cults come into the picture because people want somebody to save them.

Human beings are fallible in the sense that they are limited in knowledge, strength, and power. Only the total conscious being is infallible. The order itself is the conscious being, the order being not separate from the conscious being. Īśvara is the infallible; the order is infallible.

If I find the order is fallible, it is not the order that is fallible, but my understanding of the order that is wrong. The order can never disappoint me. It is my expectation that disappoints me. And that is to be expected because my knowledge is limited.

The devotee in us is the basic person who plays different roles.

The basic person is always relaxed. Between the basic person and the role that the basic person is called upon to play, there is always a distance, and the distance is the awareness of the basic person.

To one person, we are related as a son or a daughter. To another person, we are related as a husband or a wife. To another person, we are related as a father or a mother. To another person, we are related as a brother or a sister. To another person, we are related as a neighbour, as a friend, and so on. The person being the same, the roles vary.

I, the subject, am the same. Therefore, I am father, I am son, I am husband, I am brother, I am wife, I am mother, I am daughter, I am sister. *I am* is constant in all this, but whom I relate to is variable. *I am* always there in all the relationships. Therefore, I am constant. But am I totally constant? No! There is a certain variable component there also. To my father, I am son. But to my son, I am father; and to my brother, I am brother. That means what? Not only are the people different, I am also different. I am son, I am father, I am brother. It is clear that I am also changing. However, there is also an invariable element in this. *I am* is invariable.

I am is the basic conscious person (*puruṣa*), not male or female. This is what we are, and this conscious person is playing different roles like father, son, and husband. Some roles are a little difficult to play, but still they are roles. I am father with reference to my son or daughter; I am son with reference to my parents.

Each role is a status that I assume depending upon the relationship. This is how we are all cast in life. The world is a stage, and we are all players playing different roles, and every role has a script that becomes evident according to the situation. Nobody has to write the script. We all know exactly what we have to do, and if we do not know, we can ask somebody. We can follow this script meticulously and happily if we know, “I am the basic person playing the role.”

Imagine an actor playing the role of a beggar. The actor is on the stage now; and, according to the script, he has to undergo a lot of pain. People abuse this beggar, and he has to suppress his feelings and still go about begging. Now and then he has to cry. He is happy because he is shedding real tears. The tears just roll down his cheeks. The people in the audience are also crying.

He is congratulating himself: “I am doing very well.” Not only he thinks he is doing well, but a friend, who is sitting in the audience, also thinks he is doing well and comes backstage to congratulate him: “Hey, you did wonderfully. How did you manage to cry like that?”

However, while crying even more the next day because he lost a loved one, if the same friend were to say, “Hey, you are crying even better today, congratulations!” that would be inappropriate. That was a role; this is real.

Let us look at that role. The actor was congratulated for his crying. He was also self-congratulating. How come? Because he is not the role. There is a cushion of understanding “I am not the role.” The actor is not the beggar even though the beggar is the actor. The role’s body is his body; the role’s mouth is his mouth; and all the words in the script are from his tongue. Therefore, the beggar is totally the actor, not just partially the actor (there is no distance by time between the actor and the beggar), but the actor is not the beggar. (B is A; A is not B.)

The beggar is suffering; the actor is not suffering. The beggar’s suffering is confined to the beggar, not because the actor is different but because the actor is not the beggar. So understanding that the beggar is the actor but the actor is not the beggar is the cushion. That knowledge gives us the space to play the role according to the script and enjoy playing it also.

We find ourselves in a given setup in a vast universe where there are a few significant people whom we would like to change. Those significant people bother us, and related to those people we are playing various roles. But in real life, we don’t look at it as playing roles. We assume that on the stage it is a role, but offstage it is not a role. However, “offstage” is also a stage.

The drama of life has to be understood. Shakespeare had a great mind and somehow felt all this without Vedānta because the truth is the same. He understood the emotions of the human mind very well, and he had a way with words. As someone said, Shakespeare's mind is the platform of the world. He said, "The world is a stage; all men and women are but players," which is true.

My relationship with Īśvara is basic, fundamental, and invariable.

When I relate to my grandfather, I am grandson. When I relate to my father, I am son, not grandson. In order to be a son, I replace my grandfather with my father. My relationship with the Lord is not the same. As an individual, I am fundamentally related to the Lord whether I recognize the relationship or not. This relationship is expressed by the word "devotee."

As a devotee, when I assume the role of father or son, the devotee is not replaced. This relationship between the Lord and me is the same as that between my father and the Lord or my friend and the Lord. The devotee remains due to the abiding nature of the relationship with the Lord. First and last, I am a devotee connected to the total, to Īśvara. I am a conscious being; Īśvara is a conscious being. That particular relationship is basic, fundamental, and invariable. Therefore, when I am a father or a mother, I am that basic person, the devotee. I am a devotee father, a devotee mother, a devotee husband, a devotee wife, a devotee son, a devotee neighbour.

Awareness of my being that basic person, the devotee, is a cushion, a space that gives me the freedom from being stressed by playing a role. We cannot avoid playing roles just so that we can avoid stress. We have to play our roles. If you list all the problems you have, you will find that all the problems belong to the roles.

As a father or mother, daughter or son, husband or wife, you have some problems. All these problems are the role's problems, not the person's problems. Where is stress I would like to know? Is there any drama without plots and without changes? There is no drama in life without plots. All that must be there. Real life is like that. There are very quick turns. Shakespeare was famous for those turns. Everything is going well; then suddenly everything changes. The drama of life has to be understood as such.

As an individual, I see myself as a devotee. A relationship that exists with Īśvara is recognized. As a devotee, I invoke the help and the grace of the Lord by an act of prayer. Prayer is an action. The result is what is called "grace." I create grace through the act of prayer; and, also, through the various forms of prayer, I establish my bonding with Īśvara.

The significant people that are in the cast of our life may make some omissions and commissions. Sometimes there are omissions and commissions on our part also. A good actor makes up for all the omissions and commissions and keeps the drama going and makes it enjoyable, too.