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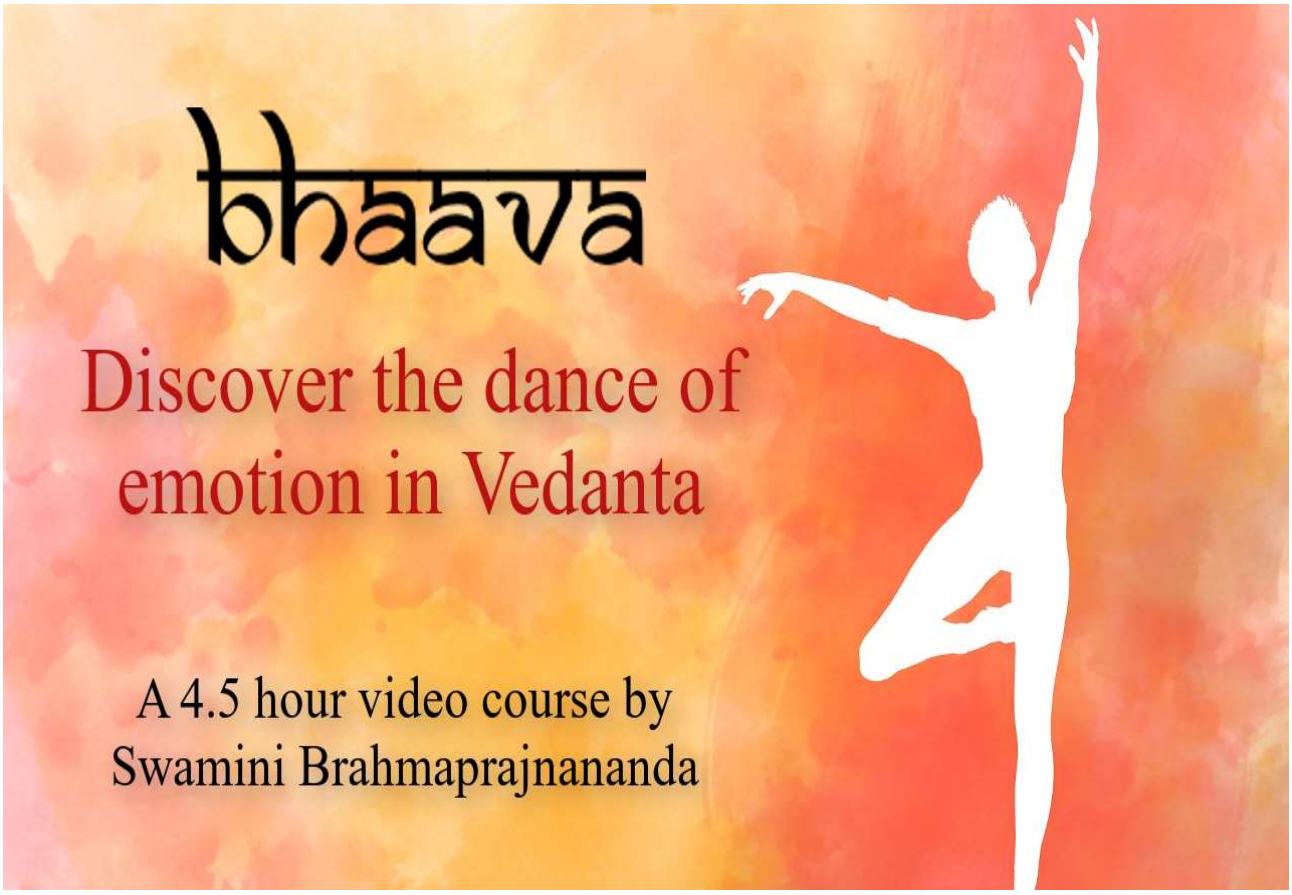
Namaste
&
Welcome to the course - Bhaava



(Edited transcription of the video course kindly done by Ms Varsha Shankar)

Video Playlist –
https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL5vNI4hvD69p-VPfHM8Jn6AXjye-5csXp

Bhaava - Discover the dance of emotion in Vedanta

About the course

We have a mixed relationship with the landscape of our emotions.

We are moved by compassion, excitement, patriotism and most importantly love. We revel and thrive in these emotions.

And yet, when we are faced with sadness, hurt, guilt, we almost wished we did not have these emotions at all. We wished we could choose the emotions we want but we can't. We wished we did not have certain emotions but we do. Some of the questions we often ask of experts and mull over ourselves, is

How do I control my emotions? Why do I suddenly get hijacked by my emotions? Is there a connection between my thinking and feeling? How can I be in harmony with my loved ones?If I am understanding some Vedanta, where is the promised Ananda?

The course **Bhaava – Discover the dance of emotion in Vedanta**, was conducted in response to these often felt dilemmas and frequently asked questions. It is a good preparation for Vedanta.

This document is a guide and transcription of the video recordings (link to video playlist below) of a 4 hour online course conducted by Swamini Brahmaprajnananda, for a group of students across the world. The objectives of each class is outlined in each class section

For whom?

Whether you're a longtime student of Vedanta, an enthusiastic beginner, or somewhere in between, this course will offer you teachings and tools for embracing the entirety of your human experience—including all your emotions. These are teachings that you can listen to again and again over the coming years, focusing on your practice and grounding as you navigate the journey of your life.

Theme song for the course – 'I hope you dance' – Lee Ann Womack

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bMtuygBrDWA

How to use this transcription

Some of us absorb and retain more when we see the written word rather than just listening.
And so, there are three options –

1. You can read each class and then watch and listen to the video recording as it will cement your learning. OR
2. You can watch and listen to the video recording and then read the transcription. OR
3. You can keep the transcription on standby and read each section of each class before or after that section.

Prayers, that you may discover and dance the dance of emotion in Vedanta.

Bhaava - 1

Class 1 will help you

- Learn the glorious vision of the Upanishads surrounding '*rasa*' and '*ananda*' (fullness).
- Get an overview of the *Navarasa* theory of emotion from Natyashastra which is the foundational text for all arts – music, dance, theatre in India
- Listen to the story from Bhagavatam (an ancient text) of Dhruva, a five year old child who felt abandoned by his father and was blessed with a mantra
- Homework for chanting the mantra

Let us begin with the word "Bhaava". The root of this sanskrit word means "to be". Colloquially, Bhaava is understood as "emotion". And yet, it is much more than emotion. Bhaava in sanskrit stands for both emotion, and also the accompanying thought (cognition).

In the English language, we make a distinction between "thought" and "emotion". There is no word for the combination of these two. It is very interesting to note this. **Thinking contributes to language, but language also shapes the way you think!** Let us take an example. The thought maybe "I have a class to attend today at 5 pm". The accompanying emotion could be one of excitement, apprehension, ambivalence or a combination of these. **The accompanying emotion is related to the thought.** The Sanskrit word Bhaava would include the emotion and the thought. This is because the cultural thinking is that **no emotion can stand in isolation.** There are always some accompanying thoughts related to the emotion. We will explore this some more.

We see that most of us are very emotional people. Either we are withdrawn because we feel misunderstood by those around us and this made us withdraw into our shell, or we express our emotions. The intensity of emotion felt maybe different among different people, and how you express it maybe different too. The bottom line though is that everyone is emotional.

We are both emotional and cognitive beings. The beauty of this culture was that Bhaava was encouraged. We have no problem whatsoever with emotion. We observe that we feel close to another human being when we discuss emotions. Discussing facts does not bring about this closeness.

Instead of looking at emotion as a problem, let us ask **"How can emotion enhance my life"?**

Along with Vedanta and Bhagavad Gita, we also have "**Shaastra**" in our arsenal of repositories of knowledge. A Shaastra is a body of knowledge, and there are different kinds of shaastra for different purposes. The word bhaava particularly comes from "Naatya Shaastra", which was written by Bharat Muni. This work talks about aesthetic pleasure and the rasa (pleasure) derived from all emotions. "Naatya" refers to theatre and related arts. Naatya Shaastra forms the basis for all classical dance, music, theatre arts in India. It also has many similarities with theatre in Greek civilization.

Naatya Shaastra has more than 6000 verses and covers in detail the how and what and why of acting (theatre). How the actor must present himself, what the props need to be like, what musical instruments are to be used, what is the puja that needs to be done before the play begins, how can one go deeper into the aesthetic pleasure of the play, and so on. One particularly interesting (to us in the context of emotions) aspect is that in chapter 6 and 7, Bharat Muni talks about the theory of emotions.

Generally, in Indian philosophy, there is the path of "*pravritti*" where one goes towards and closer to some topic, and the path of "*nivritti*" where one moves away from or withdraws from certain pursuits. Naatya Shaastra (also called Natya Veda) encouraged everyone to go deep into pleasure! It was written for the common person - not necessarily someone who was into the study of Vedanta and on the path of cultivating Viveka and vairagya. It essentially says that universally, aesthetic pleasure is close to everyone's heart. **The capacity to experience pleasure is called "rasa", and it comes about when certain things happen in the environment.**

In Taittiriya Upanishad, there is a verse: *'Raso vai saha'*

The Upanishad, which talks about the nature of who you are and is considered the highest knowledge available to humanity - that same Upanishad is saying that the sukha (happiness) you experience (in other words rasa) is indeed Brahman! The ultimate reality! And when one gains that aesthetic pleasure that comes from Brahman, one discovers his own nature as happiness. As fullness. This same rasa was spoken of in Naatya Shaastra. While the Upanishads were only available to the select few who sought a teacher and lived in a gurukulam, Naatya Shastra said that **rasa was available to everyone because all emotions are in every human heart.**

There is no emotion to be avoided, no emotion to be scared of and certainly no emotion to suppress.

Everyone enjoys movies or theatre of one kind or another. There are some that delight in the experience of watching a good horror film! Others may not understand this "joy of being scared" at all. "Why would you pay to be scared?", they may ask. But the horror movie aficionado is able to get rasa in getting scared! He is able to enjoy the essence of the experience. Then there are some of us who will go watch a movie or play even though we have heard that the subject matter and the ending are not light or happy. The piece is sorrowful. And yet the person cries, is moved, and appreciates the skill with which the subject was handled. The movie is more than just moving images - it has touched you at a very deep level. It has touched you emotionally.

We thus see the truth of the assertion made in Naatya Shaastra that rasa is indeed available to everyone. Through movies, dance, music and theatre performances, rasa is available to everyone regardless of whether one is a villager or a city dweller, or what class of society he or she belongs to.

The words rasa and bhaava are also used in Ayurveda. Rasa there means "the essence of something". Ayurveda is interested in the essence of the food that is eaten by the human being.

Veda is a body of knowledge that was received by the seers thousands of years ago and has been preserved by oral tradition. It is not a product of human imagination. This body of knowledge maps human needs as four-fold. The first pursuit is that of security, called *"Artha"*. All over the world, human beings are in the pursuit of security through earning for a living or managing what one has earned so that it will suffice. But just security is not enough. It matters to us where we live, who we work with, where we work, what relationships we engage in. All this falls in the second category - the pursuit of "*kaama*" or pleasure. And this pursuit of *kaama* is relevant to all of us in every age and stage of life. From the five-year-old who has on opinion on what does and does not taste good, to the eighty year old who enjoys a comfortable pair of well cushioned shoes! We pursue pleasure in different avenues as we live our lives. The third pursuit is that of "*dharma*", or universal framework of values. Yet, we find that even with all these three pursuits, regardless of what one has or how one is treated by others, we cannot escape self judgement. And we have on opinion on others too.

Some of us look down upon ourselves. We feel "I am not ok". This maybe coupled with a feeling of "Other people are ok. In comparison I am in bad shape" or, "others are also not ok. This life is not worth living" - which is a rather dystopian view of the world. Some may feel they are ok, but others are not ok! In which case, they cannot bear to interact with others because it all seems to worthless. The healthiest state to be in is **"I am ok as I am. You are also ok as you are".** Then there is no question of superiority or inferiority. Even misunderstandings can be sorted out as we are on equal footing.

This understanding of "I am ok and you are also ok" comes from **our ability to understand, live with and harness our emotions.** Equally important is our ability to not be victimized by our emotions. Many of us lay out warnings - "Don't press my buttons, once I get angry you have had it!". Or we may recount experiences where anger overtook us and the recipient bore the brunt of all our frustrations.
As thinking, self controlling beings, surely our anger is not bigger than us?
This is what Vedanta will teach us.

Vedanta is a body of knowledge that is found at the end of the Vedas. It talks about how one can be free from self judgement. Not by positive thinking! But by recognizing that **you are much more than your body and mind. In fact, you are limitless.**

Coming back to our focus for this discussion, let us try to understand Rasa and Bhaava better. The more comfortable we are with our emotions, and the more we understand them, the more we will be able to effectively harness them for whatever we are doing in our lives.

Bharat Muni talks about 8 primary kinds of Bhaava. He calls them psychological states that are there in everyone. The states are invoked in each person at different points depending on experience and situation. At other times they stay as unmanifest. We have

earlier defined Bhaava as the combination of emotion-cognition. Rasa is the pleasure you derive from Bhaava.

Bhaava can be your own, or portrayed/experienced by someone else. This can be illustrated with the example of cat/dog videos online! When you see a clip of a cat petting a dog, you are filled by the affection that you feel is being displayed. A cat or dog lover will enjoy it even more! The cat has not pet you. But when you see the exchange of emotion (as interpreted by you), there is a rasa in you. There is a warmth, affection, love invoked in you. It is important to note that the emotion did not travel from the cat to you.
All bhaavas exist in our heart and get invoked at different points in time.

The first Bhaava is love (Ratihi)

At this point we can do a small exercise. On a sheet of paper, complete the following sentences with whatever comes to your mind immediately:

I feel loved when …..

I feel loving (towards someone) when …..

Pay special attention to the thought patterns you have related to what you feel.

Many of us feel loved when we are understood by those around us. The corollary would then be that if others don't understand me, then I don't feel loved. Or if I feel loved when I am with my family, then when I am away from them I don't feel loved!
It is an external condition, that now conditions my feeling!
A special set of situations that limits me from feeling a certain way. In all of this, I have not even begun to understand where Ishvara is!

Ishvara is a word we use to refer to god. That which is the material cause and the intelligent cause of all the names and forms that we see around us.

Is it possible to feel loved all the time? Yes. I am telling you is possible. The more we understand Ishvara, the more you feel loved all the time. We will come back to this.

When you love another, you experience no separation from that other. When you feel totally understood, even if you are miles away, you feel one with that person. That feeling of "oneness" helps you feel that you can handle anything. Like the young man who said he felt like batman, superman, spiderman all rolled into one! All because one other person on this planet of 7 billion said she loves him! What a transformation romantic love creates. The problems of yesterday still exist - the traffic is still jammed, parents still don't understand you and your boss is creating problems for you - but your whole perspective changes because one other person on this planet thinks you are lovable and acceptable. It may not last very long, but it does happen.
An emotion can transform your perspective. That is how powerful it is!
Likewise, **your perspective can also influence the emotion you experience.**

Romantic love is only one facet. There is love in many other relationships. Love between mother and child, sibling love, love for your friends, love of pets, love for the country - there is an entire range. In this context, I want to share a very beautiful story from the Bhagavatam. The Bhagavatam is a body of knowledge (one of the 18 Puranas) with stories about the many manifestations and glory of lord Narayana/Vishnu. This story is about a five-year-old child called Dhruva. He is the elder son of king Uttamapaada from his first wife. The king had two wives, and with the younger wife he had a son called Dhruva. One evening the family is in the garden and the boys are playing. Dhruva wanted to sit in his father's lap. He starts climbing onto the king's lap, when the second wife stops him. She tells Dhruva that he has no right to sit on the king's lap because he is not her son. She shouts at Dhruva and drags him away. When Dhruva pleads with her and starts crying, she tells him that if he really wants to sit in his father's lap, then he needs to pray. Pray that he be born as her son. Extremely hurt and upset, Dhruva runs to his mother and tells her about what just happened. The elder queen was a gentle person who didn't want to fill the child's ears with poison for his step mother. So instead, she asked the child to focus on the solution suggested. She tells him that she understands he has been hurt deeply and surely he will get an opportunity to sit in his father's lap. Prayer is important, and perhaps he can try to find an answer through prayer. Little Dhruva has been deeply affected by the incident and is willing to do anything now! He walks away from the palace and goes to a forest. There he meets a celestial being called Narada who freely travels between all the worlds. Narada sees that Dhruva is very upset and asks him what the matter is. Dhruva tells him that he has been denied his father's lap and has been told by his mother to pray for a solution. Then he asks Narada to help him. Narada gives the child a mantra and tells him that if he keeps the mantra close day and night, and continuously chants it, then Lord Narayana will help him. He further instructs Dhruva to go to the bank of river Narmada and do the japa there while visualizing Narayana relaxing on Ananta (the original coiled mattress!). The creation has come from him and the orders are all in place and all this is effortless for Bhagavan! This visualization is something we can all use to connect with Bhagavan in our japa.

The mantra given by Narada was "*Om Namo Bhagavate Vaasudevaaya*" - my salutations to the one in whom everything and everyone resides. In other words, we are always in the lap of Narayana! Every mantra is a prayer - an invocation of Bhagavan through a sacred sound. It is a puja done through sound.

So Dhruva starts his japa of in the forest. 5 months pass. Initially he eats roots and fruits, later surviving on water and eventually just air! What started off as a quest to gain his father's love turns into an all-consuming *sadhana* that Dhruva enjoys thoroughly. The other *devata-s* see his intense penance and are hassled by the power of the japa as well as the will power of the little boy doing the japa. They run to Narayana and request him to please go and take care of this devotee who is determined to meet him. Narayana also sees Dhruva's tapas (austere penance) and decides it is time to go meet him. When Narayana appears before Dhruva, initially the boy is so focused on his visualization and reveling in the japa, that he does not open his eyes. Lord Narayana then removes the visual from Dhruva's mind's eye. This shakes Dhruva out of his reverie and he opens his eyes. He is stunned to see the Lord standing in front of him exactly as he had visualized in his mind! His prayers had been answered! Dhruva is unable to speak so he stands in silence looking

at the lord. Then lord Narayana touches Dhruva on his cheek with his conch (which is symbolic of giving him the knowledge of the Vedas), and Dhruva starts singing the glories of Narayana. There are eight verses of beautiful praise called "*Dhruva stuti*", where he talks about his discovery of Ishvara as everything that he sees around him. Narayana sees that this little boy, all of five years, has truly understood Ishvara (Bhagavan - Narayana himself).

Lord Narayana then tells Dhruva that he will not only gain the position he wanted on his father's lap, but he will also be king. And when he chooses the end of this earthly life, he will be the pole star in the night sky. The pole star which is steadfast and around whom the sun and its solar system, the *saptarishis* (7 rishis) included, all revolve. Revolving around an entity is a mark of respect and is very significant in our culture. It is called "pradakshina" and is practiced commonly in temples around the deity. It is symbolic of the wish of the devotee to know Ishvara in all his glory. The deity represents Ishvara and the devotees not only see the front facet which is decorated, but walk around to express the desire to know Ishvara from every angle and feel close to him.

Thus Dhruva, who left the palace as a small child wanting to gain his father's love, starts back with the maturity and love gained from his tapas, and the blessing of being granted *darshan* of the lord. Meanwhile Narada has visited king Uttamapaada who now regrets his actions and sees clearly that it was wrong to be so caught up in his obsession of his second wife that he was unable to speak up for his child at the right time. Narada listens to the king and sees that his contrition is real. He assures the king that his son is well and will return shortly. Dhruva indeed returns. He enjoys his father's love and continues to live a full life. At the end of 30,000 years of his rule, he leaves his earthly body and takes his place among the stars.

Young Dhruva started off wanting to gain his father's love. He started from a position of feeling unloved. Through his *shraddha* and discipline, which gained him the blessing of Lord Narayana, he realized that his sense of isolation and disconnection was a result of not knowing Ishvara.

The truth is that we are all always in the lap of Ishvara.

At every moment of every day, all the processes that keep this body functioning, all the forces that support your existence, every breeze, every drop of water, all the laws and principles that uphold you as you sit wherever you are, the laws and principles that uphold your various pursuits - that all of this is Ishvara is something to be understood.

Exercise:

Please take a piece of paper and draw a simple representation of yourself in the center. Now think about all the nicest things that you have heard said about yourself - all the beautiful, loving things people have said to you at different points in your life. The words could be from loved ones or from strangers. Write them down around this picture. This will take some time. You may want to start today and continue to work on it over the next couple of days.

All these statements about you indicate to you that you are loveable. It may not feel like it at times! But we must understand that "The fact that I am a manifestation of Ishvara, makes me loveable". This is true even though I have angularities in my personality that make me irritating sometimes! The angularities are something we can work on. For me to see that I am the love that I seek, I have to first start with seeing that I am loveable. Even if it was seen only by a couple of people at some points in time - we start there. And from there we proceed to see that what truly makes us lovable is that "**I am a manifestation of Ishvara**".

So think through all the things that have been said to you and fill the page with all the complements that you have received. Don't run away from this task! And don't focus on the criticism received - maybe even from the same people. Focus only on the good stuff that was said about you. For some of us, this can act as an invisible armour. As we interact with others in this world, often we are psychologically hurt. To take care of this hurt, the first step is to allow past wounds to heal. No one should run into battle wounded! And then we also need some protection to ensure that we are not constantly hurt by all the criticism heaped on us. The criticism could also be imagined because we are not thinking clearly. Either way, some protection is needed so that we don't feel constantly wounded. The exercise is to invoke all the wonderful complements we have received about us as people, our talents, our skills, our abilities. Fill the page and think about what each of them means.

Homework – please do the homework on Mantra chanting by listening to the class

Bhaava 2

Bhaava 2 will help you

• Understand the significance of being the one who is a 'suhridaya', the one with a sensitive heart, capable of experiencing all emotions and hence eligible for self knowledge.
• Learn about the 9 basic emotions spoken of in the Natyashastra with no judgment on any negative emotion.
• Recognise eight facts about the manifestation of emotions
• See the relevance of a Bhagavad Gita verse (6.5) in being one's own best friend or an enemy
• Adopt the simple practice of talking to yourself lovingly with acceptance
• Accept a two week challenge of expressing and no complaining.

The homework from the first class was to chant the mantra "Om Namo Bhagavate Vaasudevaaya" along with a certain visualization. The task was to observe what one feels and what happens when one does the chanting. Different people will have different reactions, but overall, since you heard the story of Dhruva, you may have felt loved and also vulnerable. When you love someone or feel loved by someone, it means you have an open heart. Your defenses are down, you are not trying to be overly strong or stoic - you are just yourself. And there is comfort in feeling loved. You feel worthy and deserving. Because you are a manifestation of Ishvara. You don't feel a need to prove a point to anyone. Some may have gotten a glimpse of what it means to just be oneself and relaxed. For some it may have evoked memories of the times in our lives when there have been abusive words and harsh behavior from people who we expected would love us. This may have made you uncomfortable. Observe all the emotions felt and let them be.

The other part of the homework was to make a compilation of the best and kindest words people have said to you over the years. This will function as an invisible armor.

Both parts of the homework are important in our goal to internalize that even though we have behaved in nasty ways at times, we are loveable people.

One of the commentators on the "Naatya Shaastra" says that it takes a sensitive heart (*suhridaya*) to experience and really enjoy life. A person with such a sensitive heart will not have too many masks or filters. They will not have too many "dos" or "don'ts". Any and every emotion is welcome because the person knows that they are bigger than each one.

Emotions and thoughts come and go all the time.
Some stay longer than others.
All emotions arise in you and resolve in you.
They have nowhere else to go.
If you can welcome every emotion, then you are not worried to experience any emotion.

You don't worry that sadness may lead to suicidal thoughts. That anger may lead to harsh words that end relationships. There is an ease in dealing with emotions.

Shringaaraha is one of the primary bhaavas dealt with in Naatya Shaastra. It stands for different aspects of **love including beauty.** The other 7 are:

Haasya: Cheerful state of mind
When you listen to or watch a funny show (or a stand-up comic), or when you yourself are able to make light of a situation, or when you find something funny and laugh - then you feel a certain lightness or cheerfulness. This is another primary bhaava.

Karuna or Shoka: Sadness/compassion
When you see someone suffering or crying, you have the Bhagavan given ability to empathize with them. Even if your life is going very well, and you had nothing to do with whatever is causing the other person sadness, just hearing them tell their story is enough for you to feel their sadness. It may even bring tears to your eyes. Because you are open, and maybe you have lost something at some point in your life (could be property, reputation, time, so on) you can empathize. You feel the shoka (sadness) or karuna (compassion).

Raudra: Anger
Everyone gets angry! All anger comes from helplessness. Perhaps you want someone to change and they don't. Or you want some situation to change. The expressive kind will express the anger directly. Others may withdraw and the anger may express as tears, or as psychosomatic issues in your body.

Veerya: Energy/power
We feel veerya when we feel energetic and hopeful. Veerya is associated with acts of valor also.

Bhayaanakaha: Fear

Jugupsa: Disgust
You may have seen advertisements that discourage the use of tobacco by showing cancerous growths that it can cause. This feeling of disgust one feels at seeing unpleasant sights may spur one to make better choices!

Vismaya: Wonder
When you see something that amazes you (Ishvara's creation for example), you feel a lot of wonder.

These are the 8 original bhaavas from the text.

Shanta: Peace
Shanta bhaava is the ninth that was added by commentators. It refers to the tranquility that comes from peace.

All these nine bhaavas are in every human heart. There is no reason for any of us to resist any of these emotions, including anger and sadness. Our shaastras tell us not to run away

from any emotion as they are a very natural part of each human being. There is no point fighting it or trying to suppress it.

It is important learn how not to let emotions get the better of you! This we will address in a bit.

Another thing to note about emotions is that sometimes they may be reflected when shared with someone. Love is an example of this. And sometimes, the emotions evoked maybe complementary. If I go paragliding, I may feel veerya when I invoke the memories. But in another, who is listening, the same story may invoke vismaya (wonder), jealousy or even bhaya (fear)!

Still another possibility is that emotions evoke supplementary emotions in others. When you see two angry people fighting, you may feel sad for them (why are they fighting over such a petty thing!) because you are able to see the situation from a larger perspective. Or acts of bravery (like someone eating live worms), may invoke a feeling of disgust!

This is the dance of emotion. We feel different things at different times. Sometimes we feel emotions similar to what other people are feeling. The other maybe someone you are interacting with or even someone on stage or on a screen. Sometimes we feel the opposite of what others are feeling and at other times, we may feel a supplementary emotion.

Additional points on emotions:

Our emotions sometimes have a physical manifestation and show up in our body. Like "stambha" which means to be frozen with shock. Feelings can stun you into physical stillness. Or "romanchaha" which refers to feeling goosebumps (hairs stand on end - also called horripilation!). Sometimes emotions can make your voice quiver even when you suppress the emotion and talk with a straight face.

Different cultures/communities/families deal with emotions in different ways. Some cultures encourage the expression of emotions. Like in Brazil, many people tend to be more open and comfortable expressing their feelings. Others may subscribe to stereotypes like telling boys they should not cry "like a girl".

Everybody feels, but how much is expressed and what is encouraged may differ in different cultures.

We don't want to be hijacked by our emotions. The more we are aware of our emotions, we can harness them and not suppress emotions. Let us take an example of a married person feeling attraction for another person (not the spouse). Most will try to suppress the emotion - better not to even entertain the thought! Allowing the emotion to come and go is a better way of dealing with the emotion. Of course no action needs be taken! But no guilt needs to be felt for an emotion.

Then there is the whole world of the "unconscious". Feelings can be overt or covert. As we were growing up, we absorbed a lot from our environment. Perhaps we were made to feel

ashamed about certain things. Perhaps we were afraid we might be rejected. Now this plays out in our relationships. If you feel insecure in a relationship, you may not express yourself openly - fearing that the other person may not approve of you. You don't want to be judged. Either you express this to yourself or you put on a brave front and dismiss the feeling of insecurity totally.

In the range of experiences, feelings can be seen as positive (content, happy, cheerful, amused and so on) or something that causes a struggle (worry, anger, disappointment and so on) or neutral (sleepy, curious).

The intensity of our emotions depends on the person and the circumstances. Further, the intensity of emotion felt is directly proportional to the intensity of the raaga (craving) one has for the given person, object or situation. The more you dwell on something, the more intense the craving (raaga) or hatred/annoyance/disgust (dvesha) becomes. So we see that for every emotion there is an accompanying cognition (or thought).

Many a times we find that we overreact (based on emotion) to situations that we face. Take for example a situation where you visit someone's house. The host invites you in and just as you settle into a chair, says "Oh please don't sit there! It's a special place". Some people may be able to handle this in a matter of fact way and say "ok - let me find another seat". But for others, if they have felt rejected in the past, it will bring up an extreme emotional response. Either it will be anger ("How dare this person speak like this to me"), or it can be sadness ("This always happens to me. Even for a place to sit, I am being asked to move as I am not good enough for the seat") that makes you withdraw and sulk in a corner. Or you can have a sarcastic comeback that puts the other person down in response to feeling put down. Even if the request was very matter of fact and there was no mal intention, the response is extreme and not in line with the situation. The cause of this extreme reaction is not the current situation, but some old baggage that is being faithfully carried around without processing. It is particularly important for Vedanta students to take responsibility for our emotions and work with them.

Overall, emotions propel us forward. They may help or hurt the situation, but generally it is a glory that we have that we can experience such a wide range of emotions. We must learn to be sensitive to emotions. The word "sensitive" is not used in the sense of being "touchy" and easily hurt, offended or angered.

If one is sensitive it makes us more aware of oneself including one's pain and that of others.

If one is only sensitive to the pain of others then one is most likely running away from some personal pain.

If one is only sensitive to one's own pain then that is just simple selfishness!

We want to feel equally sensitive both to ourselves and the other.

Emotions are not something that can be wished away. We are each constantly in a dance with the energy of emotions and must harness it. It is a force that can be used for our

many pursuits. Depending on the music, the pace of the dance can vary. The clearer we are regarding our priorities and pursuits, we more we find that we are comfortable with emotions -our own as well as those of the other. Whether the other is sobbing uncontrollably or shouting, you can handle it and when you feel an intense emotion, you are able to express or not and handle it appropriately.

You are always in-charge.

The emotion is never in-charge.

This comes from a certain self-mastery.

In the 6th chapter of the Bhagavad Geeta (Dhyaana yoga) there is a verse (6.5) where self-mastery is being spoken of in the context of self-knowledge.

॥ *Uddhared atmanaatmaanam naatmaanam avasaadayet*
Atmaiva hyaatmano bandhuratmaiva ripuraatmanah ॥

May you lift yourself by yourself. May you not destroy yourself. Because you yourself are your friend and you yourself can be your enemy.

To be able to deal with the external issues as well as your own internal issues, you have to be able to be a friend to yourself. The exercises from the first session will help us with this goal. Through the exercise you now have a tool that can help to be more loving, supportive and encouraging to yourself.

The world at large may not believe in and may not encourage your pursuits (especially that of Vedanta!) And many a time we internalize what we hear. We are not able to keep the "external" out. Often, because this comes from people whom we love and admire - our parents, partners, friends. We are unable to filter and we end up absorbing everything. Therefore our aim is a certain self-mastery, which comes only from being loving, supportive, encouraging to oneself. That is the voice in your head which is constantly chattering. Usually this voice is that of a doubter or a critic.

We want to transform the quality and tone of this voice to give us a constantly encouraging, loving, supportive environment wherever we go.

Without this friendly voice, we will feel less about ourselves even if we go to an ashram. The doubting voice tells us that we are not enough - not doing enough. It compares us to the others we see and finds us short in commitment, skills, talent - everything! "Look at these people! They have so much faith! And they know sanskrit, and chanting and so on! And look at me - taken to it so late in my life and have so far to go! I am unable to understand half of what is being said! How will I make progress!". Constant chatter. This is of course just one example. There is constant chatter, in this tone, happening about different situations. We want to give this chatter a certain direction so that it can help us instead of bringing us down. And that is what Sri Krishna is referring to when he says **"May you be your friend. May you not be your own enemy".**

We see numerous examples of people who seemingly have it all - fame, success, money, fans, relationships - and yet take their own lives. The emotion of hopelessness takes over to such an extent that it seems impossible to carry on living. It is the intensity of this emotion of hopelessness (and not some analysis) that causes the person to decide there is no way forward.

How is this possible? To understand this, we have to recognize that

all emotion is a build-up of thought.

This buildup can happen to anyone and can result in an enormous castle with no substance indeed!

For example - a simple way to feel anxious would be to repeat "oh my god!!" (or its equivalent in your culture) repeatedly in an alarmed tone. Say it 10 times with "I don't know what I am going to do!" sprinkled in for good measure. This will surely get your heart palpitating. If you want to feel sad, then all you need to do is repeat to yourself "If only it had been different", "If things had been different", "If only I was different", "If only the other was different", "Why did this happen to me ?", "It should not have happened to me". This line of thought is certain to make you feel sad. You will start feeling a heaviness in your chest and anxious overall. This is the effect of an emotional buildup. We tend to play these messages in our heads, as we go about our lives, without being aware of it. The buildup creeps up on us. And then we wonder why we are sad and anxious!

Therefore, we must learn to be awareful of our thoughts and emotions. Being awareful means that you recognize this tendency that you have to build up your anxiety.

Being awareful does not mean you judge yourself for it.

A negative judgmental message repeated to ourselves will not help remove the anxiety! Over our lives we may have absorbed messages from others - parents and other authority figures. Some parents can be very critical. The child is never "enough". If you get good grades, they may say you have to do better. You achieve that and then they compare youth someone else who did better than you. At this point the child may say there is no point in trying to please the parent so I give up. Some parents can be very loving and supportive and you may grow up feeling secure. Some parents provide good structure for the children and teach children how to cope with situations in addition to being loving and supportive. Depending on the kind of messages we grew up with and unconsciously absorbed, the chatter in our heads will be similar. This influence could even come from a partner. Overall if your partner is loving and kind to you, then you are likely to be loving and kind to yourself. It could also work in another way - if you have grown up with a lot of criticism then you feel undeserving of the love and kindness! The inner chatter, the critic, is the one that frames these thoughts. We don't realize that

this dance between me and this inner voice is going on all the time.

Our goal now, is to make sure that this inner voice is a friend and not an enemy.

Challenge:

At this point let us try a challenge. Let us try to communicate without complaining for the next two weeks. What does this mean?

Generally we tend to use statements like this: “You never listen to me”, “You always do this”, “Why are you doing this to me?”, “I told you not to do this! Still you are doing this”, “Instead of standing here looking at me, why don't you do something?”, “You never have time for me”. Notice the tone of the statements. These are complaints and a lot of us are used to complaining when we communicate. Many of us are angry when we communicate and tend to use statements like “This is not ok, that is not ok, stop this!”.
The suggestion here is not to suppress emotion. Rather, you learn to tell the other about what you want in a more positive tone.
For example, instead of “You never give me time!”, change that to saying “I would like some time from you. Is that possible?”. We complain because we are hiding behind our emotion. Instead, bring the emotion upfront, communicate it to the other person and ask if what you want is possible. You are opening the door for dialog and not stopping the conversation. If you start complaining, the other person will start doing the same and then it becomes a competition over who is the more aggrieved party –has the longer complaint list! We want to stop this cycle.

Whatever situation you are in - be aware of what you are feeling. If appropriate, express how you feel. If not, acknowledge the emotion to yourself. And then definitely ask for what you want. (If you don't know what you want then first think about it and figure it out!) Then ask the other if it is possible for that person to respond. You will find that with this method of communication, your relationships become a lot closer.

Over the next two weeks, every morning tell yourself:

I take responsibility for my emotions. I will express myself and not complain.

If someone complains, instead of becoming defensive, I will try and understand what the person wants. I will step up and verbalize what I think the other person is feeling so that we can move on to discussing what it is they want.

This is to be done genuinely - not to manipulate people.

The goal is to be more open and honest with our emotions, and really have a sensitive heart.

Vedanta only works for someone who is trying to be open and honest, and not trying to manipulate the world.

You are comfortable with all that is.

You are not trying to resist, change or fight - yourself or others all the time.

(Guided Visualization to change the tone of how you speak to your inner child self)

Bhaava 3

Class 3 will help you

- Clearly see the connection between your thought and emotion
- Discover how we build subjectivity and hence misery by living in our own world (jiva srishti) rather than living in an objective world (Ishvara srishti)
- Identify 10 types of certain patterns of thinking which are thought distortions that contribute to your subjectivity.
- Learn to challenge these patterns and experience a transformation in your emotions through changing the context.
- Learn four questions that align your thoughts with reality and do homework

The challenge from the previous segment was to communicate without complaining. Definitely you must ask for what you need. Focus on doing it without complaining. This method will likely bear more positive results than complaining. There is no guarantee that you will get what you want of course! But the likelihood that you will be heard is very high. It opens the door for further dialog and hopefully for a resolution that works for everyone involved.

As adults, are we comfortable expressing what we want to people whom we are close to? If you want someone's time, or a hug, or even for them to speak in a kinder manner - are you comfortable expressing that need? A stranger on the street may dismiss you, but someone you feel close to will hear you and respond.

Often we are afraid of the response - that we will be judged. Afraid that we will not be accepted. Afraid that we will be looked down upon for needing time and attention. Yet,

You will grow closer to another person only when you share your emotion and the related thought.

The same closeness cannot be achieved by talking about anything else - be it cryptocurrency, or the state the economy or politics! While these maybe interesting topics that help you find things in common with someone else, its only when you share emotions, feelings and related thoughts that closeness can grow. This is true for your colleagues, family members and also for your children.

Many parents only interrogate children! What did you do? What did you eat? Whom did you meet? And so on. This is a one-way street. Parents don't stop to think that it would be nice to share their day with the child. If these parents would start talking to their children about their day, they will find that the closeness increases. With the interrogation model, the children think that they have to just answer the questions. If no questions are asked by the parent then nothing needs to be shared. With teenagers this comes down to monosyllable answers! On the other hand, when parents share their stories with the children, the children also feel more comfortable having conversations with the parents.

As adults we are also afraid sometimes of listening to others. Because listening may lead to change and we don't want to change! There is a cartoon strip that comes to mind, where the mother of cartoon character Dennis (from "Dennis the Menace") asks him to help out

in the home by picking up his toys and cleaning his room. Dennis closes his ears. And when mom asks why, he says, "You are starting to make sense now"! He logically agreed with what she was asking him to do and why, but he really did not want to do it. Now we may not physically close our ears (we don't want to be rude!), but we do tune out or "zone out" when some people talk because they may be making sense and we may need to change.

So not only do we want to put an effort into expressing our needs appropriately, we also need to be aware of the resistances we may be putting up. By being aware of this, we are trying to hold it. Hold it how? Lovingly, gently, without judgement or guilt-tripping. Like space.

Space holds everything - without judgement or condemnation.

Geniuses and idiots are accommodated by space equally. In Sanskrit, space is called "Aakaasha and is defined as "*Avakaasha Pradaatra*" - that which accommodates. Whatever patterns we discover about ourselves or others, we need to learn to expand our heart like space. If actions need to be taken for dharma's sake to right a wrong then certainly go ahead and take them. The actions you take are also accommodated because your heart has expanded. Once you have dealt with yourself, you are comfortable with yourself, you have seen the patterns and are ok with it all.

How are you ok with it? Because you see that all of it is a manifestation of a certain order.

We will see later that this order is nothing but Ishvara. So what is there to fight or resist? Who is there to condemn and label? All of it is Ishvara.

Let us try an exercise to help us see the connection between "what I feel" and "what I think". Complete the following incomplete sentences with the first thoughts that come to mind. Be brave and be free. The goal is to record what spontaneously comes to mind and become more aware if our emotions. **Pause to write these down on a separate piece of paper.**

I feel angry when ….

I feel anxious when …

I feel bored when …

I feel determined when ….

I feel enthusiastic when ….

I feel cheerful when …..

I feel hurt when ….

I feel relaxed when ….

I feel afraid when ….

I feel hopeful when ….

I feel jealous when ….

I feel lonely when …

I feel content when …

I feel exhausted when ….

Anything you feel is not in isolation. If I request you to please be angry - is it possible? Without cause how can one feel angry? On the other hand, if you think of something that makes you angry, then indeed, you can be angry. Now if I ask you to increase the degree of your anger - how would you do that? The only way would be through a buildup. More thoughts are needed. It is not possible to try to feel something without a background and supporting thoughts. For any and every emotion that comes up in me (or in the other), there is an accompanying cognition. An accompanying series of thoughts.

One of the responses from a live workshop was: I feel hurt when I am criticized
This can be logically extended to say that if no one criticizes me, if most people are kind and loving to me, then the likelihood is that I will not be hurt. On the other hand, someone else may say: I feel hurt when others don't listen to me. When others don't listen to me, I don't feel heard, I feel shut out, and I feel hurt. All of us have certain patterns of thinking that contribute to our emotions. It is very likely that the patterns contribute to our "dominant emotions". We want to try and see the connection between our emotions and our thoughts. Because we cannot fight one emotion with another emotion! Someone who is feeling hopeless cannot suddenly decide to feel hopeful. The transformation can happen only when they recognize the thoughts that are contributing to the feeling of helplessness and change them to feel more hopeful.

"Panchadashi" is a very beautiful book written by Sri Swami Vidyaranya Muni. It is a 15 chapter work on Vedanta. In the 4th chapter he talks about how "*jeeva*" (the individual) and Ishvara create "dvaitam" (duality). He says that we live in two worlds. When we are in touch with reality, we are in Ishvara "*srishti*" (creation). This is a world of facts and is common to multiple people through shared experiences. For example - "there is a class today at 4 pm India time". How you feel about the class may be different from someone else's feeling, but the existence of the class cannot be disputed. This is also referred to as functional reality". The problem arises when I am not in harmony with Ishvara Srishti - In harmony with what is around me and who I am. Why could this be? Because I have created a world of my own on the basis of the world outside. This creation of mine is called jeeva srishti. Then an effort is required to align jeeva srishti in harmony with Ishvara Srishti.

Swami Vidyaranya gives an example of this jeeva srishti. A man who lies compulsively tells a father that his son, who has travelled abroad, has died. This makes the father sad even though in reality the son is hale and hearty. The father would in fact not have been sad even if the son was in trouble, as long as he did not hear about him. Swami

Vidyaranya makes a statement at this point. He says, "*sarvasya jeevasya bandhaha maanasam krit jagat*". This is to say, the sense of bondage that is felt by all who are alive is caused by the spinning of a subjective reality by the individuals mind. This subjective reality is not in keeping with functional reality and therefore causes pain.

Among the procedures of psychiatry there is a test called "reality orientation". This is a check where questions are asked and answers evaluated to find out the extent to which the subject is aware of functional reality. It involves simple questions like "What is the day today?", "What did you have for breakfast?" and so on. For those who are mentally ill, these simple questions are very difficult to answer. The answers give the practitioner an idea of what the subject's reality orientation was - how connected is the subject to reality. On the basis of the way we interact with the world and the people around us, each of us has our own *"jeeva srishti*". These are our attempts at making sense of the world.

These ideas that we have don't just sit in our heads - they become our reality.

We are not able to see "What is" about others or ourselves. No wonder we become angry or sad, and try to find solutions in things outside - be it organic food or energy cleanses. There is another path we can take. We can address the root cause and correct our thinking.

So what are these kinds of "Jeeva Srishti", or creations I am creating about the world outside? Let us try to understand this by exploring the 10 distortions that were first laid out by an American Psychologist, David Burns. Being aware of the distortions is the first step towards being aligned with functional reality. Western psychology provides many useful frameworks that help us understand ourselves, our thoughts, our emotions and the connections between them. It is important to remember though that if you use these to condemn yourself or someone else, then it defeats our purpose - which is to be aware of the patterns and effect change, where needed, in ourselves. We want to be aware of our patterns and hold it with a gentleness so that we don't condemn ourselves.

1) Filtering: I either magnify or minimize a particular aspect of a situation.

There was an elderly couple, from the North of India, very upset with their son's decision to marry outside his own community and in particular his decision to marry a girl from the south of India. When they sought counselling, they were asked to watch a Bollywood movie on a similar theme. Since they seemed so rigid and decided in their views, it was hoped that a third party's telling of a similar story (in the form of entertainment) may make them question and/or modify their perception and conclusions. In the movie, the two families have a lot of differences and initially the interactions are rough. Eventually, the families learn to get along in the end even though they are from such different sub cultures within India. They move from mistrust and misunderstanding to a cordial relationship. Now when the couple watched the movie, they filtered out the second part! The first part where the troubles were highlighted is what stuck with them. They came back saying – 'Yes, indeed the movie portrayed our concerns very well. People from the South should not marry people from the North.' They glossed over the part where the families eventually came together saying that it was done just because the movie needed a happy ending.

This skewed interpretation of what the movie was all about is an example of filtering. They hold on to their opinion, their jeeva srishti, because that is easy. Then they don't have to change. All responsibility of change is placed on the other.

Someone who takes rigid positions like this often will find that they are frequently angry. They filter out what is inconvenient to their point of view. This maybe an opinion about another community - maybe you magnify something small or minimize something big that they do. This is all done subconsciously.

2) **"All or none" thinking: Seeing the world in black and white**
A newly married couple came in to talk about their marriage. The man had taken a long honeymoon and devoted the time exclusively to his new wife. Now that they were back, he was lost in his work and she hardly saw him and had very little communication. The man's explanation was that he likes to devote his time and energy to one thing at a time. He thought his wife should be happy he spent so much time with her on the honeymoon and should now allow him to concentrate fully on his work.
A person with this type of thought pattern is unable to see or process shades of grey. They want to compartmentalize people (even themselves) and situations. Good or bad. Ok or not. This or that. No question of anything in between. This kind of thinking results in a lot of anger as most people cannot be slotted into categories. We play many roles simultaneously and it is important to keep a dynamic balance going. The balance changes based on one's age and stage of life.

3) **Over Generalisation**
We have heard stories of some so-called Gurus behaving in a way that is not in line with dharma. Just like in any other field or vocation, there are individuals who are given to adharma who will misuse the trust placed in them. But someone who has this pattern of over generalisation in their thinking, will extrapolate this to make statements like "All gurus are terrible! Better keep away from them!". Because of perhaps a personal incident where their trust was betrayed, they will now declare that no one can be trusted in this world. Or take for example someone whose spouse forgot their birthday one year. This person now declares that the spouse does not care for them at all and must be stepping out on them! This too is a jeeva srishti and is not a healthy pattern. One incident is blown up and causes disproportional disturbance in one's mind. One needs to be able to contextualise experiences and see each one for what it is.

4) **Exaggeration**
Many of us enjoy a sense of drama in our lives and have a tendency to overstate how we feel. When we are sad, we say "Oh I am so depressed". Or "I am hopeless". A teenager exclaims to a friend "You are a fashion disaster!". The gravity of the situation does not match the intensity of the language used. And the language used contributes to us feeling upset as we have exaggerated the emotion felt.

5) **Personalisation**
Personalisation is a thinking pattern where the individual feels targeted by the words of someone else, even though that was not the intention at all. This happens often in a Guru-Shishya relationship when the shishya has been with the guru for a while and thinks he

knows the Guru very well. When the Guru uses an example to illustrate a point, the shishya may feel that the Guru is targeting him based on information shared in the past. A traditional Guru would not use the teacher's platform in this manner. Yet the students personalisation makes him think that everything is about him.

6) **Blaming**
With this pattern, the individual blames someone else for all the issues they must contend with. Starting with one's parents! They may blame the world, god, even themselves. If you hold yourself or the other totally responsible for your misery, then that line of thinking is not in harmony with reality. The Bhagavad Gita encourages the individual to move away from this blaming mindset by taking responsibility.

If I take responsibility for what I can do, and also recognise that many things are out of my control and I can only be a contributor - then I start seeing reality for what it is.

7) **Shoulds**
Many of us have a long list of "shoulds" - regarding how I should behave and how the other should behave! And when others don't behave in line with this framework, it makes us angry. Take for example a Tai Chi aficionado who tells everyone she meets that they "must" practice Tai Chi. She says it because she values what Tai Chi has brought into her life and she wishes the same benefits for everyone else. But they have their own lives and make up their own minds regarding what must be done. Her words are not given the weight that she thinks they deserve. She will need Tai Chi to deal with her own anger! Anger is a common by product in individuals who have very rigid "should"s and "should not"s. They tend to only focus on certain aspects of others and may even see conspiracies where non exist.

8) **Fantasy of fairness**
Some of us feel that when we have done our bit, we must be rewarded for it. Like the pilgrim who travelled all the way to Vaishnodevi braving the elements and the tough journey. Once she got there, she could only get a few seconds of darshan. It was very quick and she felt shoved out in the blink of an eye. This after walking 14 km in the cold!
The whole point of a pilgrimage is the journey made with the thought of Ishvara for company. And yet this pilgrim was unable to see the joy of that journey because she felt she was not fairly rewarded for her effort. Instead she had disappointment and anger at the injustice of being denied a long and satisfactory darshan. Never mind that she was not singled out for this treatment. This is how it is for everyone who travels to Vaishnodevi!
This fantasy that we have that if we do our bit then we will always be rewarded, is a dangerous delusion. It is not how the world works. The results you get for the karma performed may not be in line with what you expect. It may be less than you expect or even more than you expect.

9) **Emotional Reasoning**
In this pattern one puts too much stock into one's own emotions. If I feel I am a loser - then that must be true! Without any real logic to backup the feeling, the individual gets carried away in the certainty that the emotion is reality.

10) I am always right

This is a pitfall especially for those who believe they are in line with dharma at all times. Such a person will put the onus of change always on the other. Their own behaviour and thinking needs no review or change.

Most of us have all of these patterns in small measure. That is not a problem. But if it is in a large measure and we are struggling with our emotions, then we must recognise that we might need to modify these patterns.

How does one go about modifying a pattern?
We start with awareness.
First you recognise that you do have a tendency to think in a certain way. Hold yourself with some love and gentleness. Yes, for reasons understood or not, I do have this pattern. It is not working for me. I want to be more aligned with functional reality.

Then you ask yourself a few questions.

Is it really true?
What is the evidence for this?
Is it helpful to me?
Is this way of thinking healthy?

By asking these questions and examining our thought patterns, we will be able to more align our thinking with functional reality.

Take for example, the overgeneralisation that no one can be trusted. Is it really true? Do I trust Amazon to send me the goods in exchange for money? If yes, then I must reexamine my generalisation. You get on a train trusting the driver to not be drunk. You eat at a restaurant trusting that the chef is not out to poison you. You see that you are able to have working trust with people that you do not know at all. This working trust needs to be extended to other areas.

You recognise that – yes, I find it difficult to trust, but functioning in this way is not going to help me. There isn't any evidence to suggest that my overgeneralisation is true. So, I am going to take baby steps and start to treat others with trust. For me to function, I need to deal with the world with some working trust.

In Sanskrit there is a term “kapola kalpitam” - creation of the skull! Not of the mind - but of the skull. Meaning to say that one is not thinking clearly. When I start to examine my patterns and test it, I can start to figure out whether it is aligned with reality, or simply my “jeeva srishti” - my own “kapola kalpita” creation. This exploration is the foundation of developing Viveka. Before one examines what is real, one must be in touch with functional reality.

This is not to say that examining these patterns and bringing change into your thinking patterns is easy. Our patterns are like an old, comfortable pair of shoes. Even if the sole is

worn out and bad for our posture and arches in the long run, we still enjoy the familiarity that the shoe provides. It feels comfortable as it is well known. It takes work to recognise the long-term issues caused by the shoe and to actively make an effort to try something new.
By aligning with reality, we will find that we are a lot more cheerful and enthusiastic. We will be less sad, less angry and less frustrated with others - because we no longer have an agenda to change the whole world!

You can think of these patterns as organic manure. When you walk through a forest, along with the beautiful plants and trees you will also see dead and decaying parts of these same plants and trees. The decay is a necessary part of the process of making manure for the healthy plants. Similarly, our negative experiences that are buried in our heads can be examined and turned into something useful for growth. Once aligned with functional reality, these bad experiences stop being our experience of the world. You see what is and there is no scope for your own creation. As a result of this, you are now in Ishvara Srishti. The jeeva srishti is minimised. You are in harmony with yourself and with other people. You see that you were shaped by the good-bad-and-ugly situations in your life and the same is true for everyone else in your life. Parents, partners, children etc etc. No more hiding or withdrawing. You are capable of processing any and all pain and are capable of living in abiding peace. You are able to hold yourself and your emotions - even sadness - with gentleness.

Homework:
Identify one or two of your jeeva srishti patterns.
How does it align with functional reality?
If you were to change your thinking pattern, how would it benefit you? How would it change your behaviour?
Describe with an example each.

Bhaava 4

Class 4 will help you -

- Reflect on your homework and see how innocuous ways of thinking became unhelpful patterns.
- Understand 3 aspects of Emotional growth as Emotional security, emotional independence and emotional strength and what these entail.
- Discover the glory of the order of all emotions as Ishvara's principles of emotion.
- Practice witnessing as well as experiencing
- Learn what it means to dance with emotion rather than resist

The physical growth of a human being seems to happen as if in auto-mode with the passage of time. Animals also manage to grow to adulthood. Even the homeless who live on the streets and deal with so many more infections manage to grow to adulthood. There maybe some deficiencies and stunting – but growth happens. There isn't much choice on the individual's part to not grow-up physically. Emotional growth on the other hand is not an automatic process. It doesn't happen easily!
There are three important aspects to emotional growth that we have looked at in the previous chapters. They are:

1) **Emotional Security** - the understanding that I am taken care of, I am loved, I am accepted. I am acceptable. I am loveable.
2) **Emotional Toughness** – knowing that I can handle anything. I have the strength to deal.
3) **Emotional Health** – seeing the connection between the ways I think and the way I feel. And trying to align my thinking with functional reality by focusing on facts and objectivity.

All these three are interrelated and equally important for our growth. A person who does not have enough Emotional Toughness, for example, is easily hurt by the words and actions of others. This gets in the way of their Emotional Health too as objectivity is no longer possible when one feels victimized.

So, what does it take to achieve emotional growth? Thankfully, no super human powers are necessary! One only needs to evaluate one's own life journey and see that many tough situations have been faced. They have been faced, dealt with and overcome in the best way possible based on the wisdom one had at the time. All of us who have lived up to the age of at least 20 will have gone through, and seen a lot. Especially today in the age of the internet and social media we are exposed to much more than in any time before. Unlike Gautam Buddha who had to wait till he was 27!

Each of us has already gone through a lot and we are still standing strong.
It is very likely that each of us has at least one person in our lives who understands what we have been through and admires us for the way in which we handled what came our way. It may be a friend, an adversary or a parent. We need to understand that our

emotional security is not directly proportional to the number of people who love and accept us.

Our emotional security comes from the recognition that "I am loved and I am acceptable" . Even if only by one other human being or a furry friend. Whoever it is, they care for and love you – not because they are gifted with some phenomenal capacity, but because you are loveable. They are able to see something in you that they find loveable. An important aspect of emotional security is to be able to transfer this vision that other loving people have of you, and to be able to say "yes,

I am a loveable person. I am acceptable as a person".

This step is something that only you can do for yourself. No one else can do it for you. If this step is missed, then one is always looking for reassurance and validation.

After a beautiful day with a loved one, one may feel cared for and cherished for a while. But soon enough one is back to feeling that the other person is not doing enough, not saying enough and not appreciative of all the effort poured in. In this case, your emotional security is effectively in the hands of someone else. When that person is kind and loving and supportive, then all is well in your world. If that person's focus shifts for any reason (perhaps because they got very busy with some new situation in their lives) then you don't feel loved and accepted. You then start blaming the person and complaining that they are not doing enough. Additionally, if you have some exposure to Vedanta, you may start spouting imagined points of support from Bhagavan Krishna's words! All in expressing dissatisfaction at the other's behaviour and wanting them to change. The root cause of this is that you have not taken care of your own emotional security.

Dhruva's story (which was shared earlier) and the japa exercise that was shared are building blocks to shore up our own emotional growth. When one reflects on the story and then reflects upon the nicest words of appreciation that have been said about us by the people we love, one is able to clearly see that I am loveable and acceptable as a person. It doesn't matter how many people like you – you are acceptable and loveable and therefore they do accept and love you. This transformation of vision is key for emotional growth.

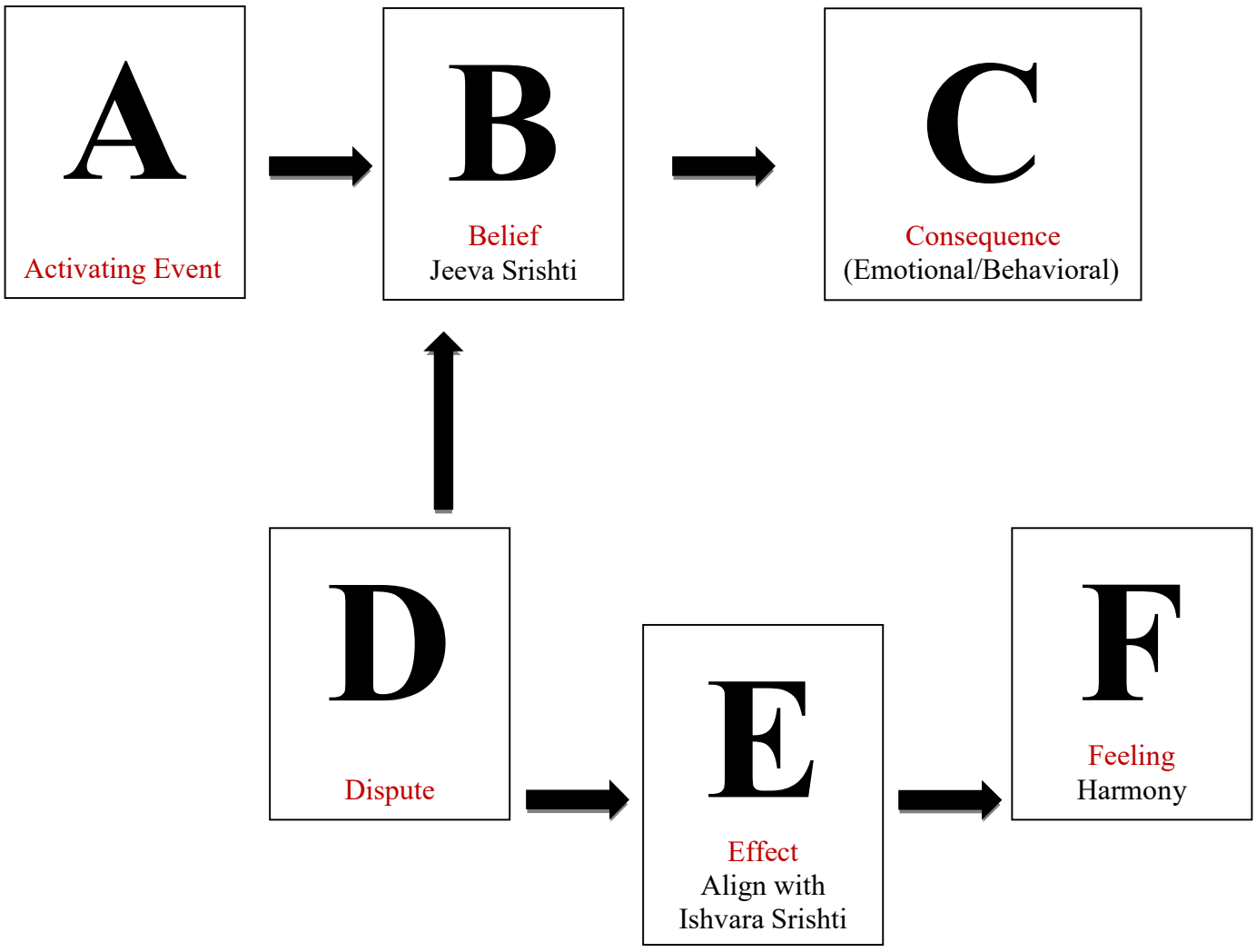
The actions and behavior of parents directly affect the children in their care. A child that grows up with criticism, will criticize others. A child that grows up with hostility will be hostile towards others. If a child grows up with appreciation, then the child will learn to appreciate others and oneself. **What the child sees at home becomes defined as "normal" and the child learns to look at the oneself and the world in the same light.** The purpose of saying this is not to blame our childhood or parents for current difficulties! It is to be cognizant of the factors that have shaped us and to then change as we see fit.

"Health" is the presence of wellbeing. Not just the absence of disease. While eliminating distortions in thinking is the first step, it is important to check if you are replacing those patterns with cognition and thinking which are healthy for you. And how do you recognize that which is healthy? Thankfully this is simple! Ask yourself,

Is your thinking is aligned with reality. Aligned with Ishvara Srishti?.

If yes, then you are in touch with functional reality. Even then there may be many interpretations of a situation. Resolving conflict would then entail communication.

Diagram – The ABC model of clear thinking



Earlier we thought that different events and situations in our lives cause sorrow, anger and so on. On some analysis, we found that this is not true. The above block diagram helps illustrate this point.

A is the activating event – for example, somebody shouted at me.
C is the consequence – I am crying.

Hiding in between these two, is B – my own belief. My own Jeeva Srishti.
Earlier I thought A led to C. People shout at me and I cry. The solution therefore is that they should not shout at me.
Not so simple!

The consequence C (Your emotional response) was a result of your belief that the person shouted at you unfairly. Then there was sadness which led to the emotional hangover.

As part of the homework, we challenged (D – disputed) this belief of ours. We checked if it was real - if it was healthy. The analysis had the effect (E) of helping us align with Ishvara Srishti.

Perhaps it was a difficult thing to do. Not natural and spontaneous at all. No problem!

In this exercise we discovered that **disputing our beliefs (not based on functional reality) is a path to aligning with Ishvara Srishti.**

Earlier you thought that people were shouting at you because something is wrong with you. You felt criticized when shouted at and the belief that "no one **should** criticize me" kicked in and resulted in the emotional consequence of sadness and crying.

The moment you have a "should" in your belief, you can be assured of misery.

Instead, you now dispute the belief and think of the situation in a new light. You say "I of course prefer it if no one shouts at me, but people may criticize me for different reasons. Maybe the person has a pattern of generally being critical of others. Or maybe the person has a job that requires them to evaluate and critique on a regular basis and this spills over into other relationships of their life as an extension. The person does not mean ill. In fact, this person cares about me and loves me. Or maybe there is some truth to what the person is saying".

When you analyse your situation and modify your own thinking in this way, the effect (E) is that you will no longer feel as sad, as angry and as upset as before. You have replaced your belief with that which is aligned with reality. You may even decide to talk to the person and request them to change the way they communicate with you or change the way you see and communicate with the person.

Finally, the Feeling (F) that you are left with is that you are in harmony. The emotions don't cause hurricane like destruction. Even if you are a little uncomfortable with the situations – that's ok. You are not unduly disturbed by the situations and your resulting emotions.

We have all accepted that once every 3-5 hours, we will feel hungry and will need to feed this body some food. If you have a healthy body then you will feel hungry. That's the way the system is designed. A belief that one should not feel hungry would not be aligned with reality!

Just as this body is a glory of Ishvara, so are our emotions. They are our glory too. Even emotions that feel unpleasant. They are actually helpful. Bodily pains are a symptom that are helpful in pointing out what parts need attention and rest. They ensure that we don't overdo actions and injure ourselves in our enthusiasm. Similarly, intense emotional pain is a symptom of something deeper that you can examine and address. It is like the emergency lights that alert us to a situation that needs to be addressed. And on

examination, we will find that the pain has a lot to do with our beliefs and therefore our behavior.

A belief is not some harmless, innocuous thing sitting in your brain.

Beliefs shape what we see as our reality.

Let us take as an example the belief someone may have that "Indians are loud". This means that person thinks Indians speak very loudly, are exhibitionist in behavior, have no manners, have no etiquette etc. This belief will result in the person wanting to avoid all Indians! Because dealing with their presence will spoil that person's experience. And any situation where the person has to deal with an Indian is already labelled as a tough situation where they can't relax. Now suppose this person meets an Indian who is the opposite of this belief – well-spoken and well mannered, then the person chalks it up to just being an exception. On the basis of some previous experiences, we create such beliefs. And these beliefs cause "*pravritti*" (going towards) and "*nivritti*" (going away from, run away from). A belief that "All Indians are loud" may make you run away from an otherwise enjoyable dinner with delightful company. Similarly, a belief that "All Indians are spiritual" may attract you to someone and cause you to waste more time than you would have if you had objectively viewed the situation.

This extends to all beliefs including the most basic one we all have – that "I am a human being. I am this body and mind". Everyone around us also has this belief so we accept it without question. Now all the problems of human beings are also my problems! I am doomed to misery and all the aches and pains and problems of this body and mind are mine. There is no respite. Even in this Vedanta class that I came to for peace, there is so much self-examination and self-enquiry! It can be very uncomfortable. I wanted to feel comfortable and secure. So now I am disappointed with Vedanta as well.

If you feel this way, don't be dejected. It is most **normal and a necessary step towards aligning yourself with functional reality.** It is a necessary step to reaching a place of fulfillment. The more you are in touch with functional reality, you will find that you are not surprised by your own behavior or the behavior of others.

You understand peoples' backgrounds and in that understanding your heart expands.

A belief is not a simple error. There are artificial plants that look so real that they can fool you into thinking they are the real thing. Once you touch them though, you realize it is not a real plant. You had made an error in judgement and the error has been corrected. You are not likely to make the same mistake again. But because beliefs fuel our behavior, and over time we nourish these beliefs to the effect that they become well entrenched.
A belief like "I am not good enough" or "I have to please everyone so that they like me" goes on for years!

We have all seen stones on riverbanks that have patterns carved on them. These patterns are created, over time, by the flowing water. The water kept flowing a certain way and the patterns were etched in. Now if water is poured over the stone, it will follow the path of least resistance and only flow in the same existing grooves. Similarly, **because of our patterns of thinking, we have created pathways in our mind.**

When dealing with any situation, we resort to our default settings.

If our tendency is to blame, then any trigger will cause thoughts to move in that direction. Blame is placed first! On the world or even on oneself; resulting in feeling miserable. What is the way out of this cycle? **The way out is to create new pathways. More effective than trying to erase old patterns, is to form new ones.** You allow the water to flow in a different way on the stone. In other words, you allow different thoughts to run in your mind. And you will find, that the more you align yourself with functional reality (by analyzing your thought patterns and disputing entrenched beliefs that are jeeva srishti), the more natural and spontaneous the new pathways will seem.

Creating a new path is not easy. On a trek perhaps you hacked through the thicket and made a path for yourself through the jungle. Even after this path was traversed 3 or 4 times, it may not be enough to create a visible pathway. It will get easily covered by vegetation since it has been used only a handful of times. How then are new pathways created? It takes many, many, travelers to use the pathway numerous times. Thankfully we don't need multiple people to go through our brains to change our thought patterns! Instead,

What we need to do is to repeat the new patterns ourselves
when situations present themselves.
Repeat the pattern until it because natural and spontaneous to us
to align ourselves with functional reality.

Move from "Everyone should love and appreciate me" – which leads to behavior that focuses on pleasing everyone and running your life by their priorities, to "I would prefer if people like me, but I understand that's not always possible. I know I am likeable and I am ok with being loved and appreciated by those who are close to me and do". You repeat this to yourself and your behavior will also change alongside. No more temper tantrums and no pity parties! Your behavior and beliefs will align, and the emotions resulting from this way of thinking are helpful to you. So, **the only magic solution is repetition and consistency.** No quick fix answers here! **Just like mastery over any skill comes from repetition, so does mastery over our thought patterns.** Repetition until it becomes natural, spontaneous and effortless.

In every situation you can then see that yes you have contributed to the situation and so has the other person. But neither of you controls the situation. The only thing that can be done is to do one's best for the given situation.

There is a wise saying –

Watch your thoughts, because they will become your choices.
Watch your choices, because they will become your habits.
Watch your habits, because they will become your behavior.
Watch your behavior, because it will become your character.
Watch your character, because it will define your life.

What starts as a small thought, if allowed to proliferate unchecked, will not stay so small after all. It can define how your life pans out. Does that mean one should be scared of one's thoughts? Certainly not! We recognize the glory of emotions and see that it is the so called "unwanted" emotions that cause issues for us. Anger, sadness, disgust, irritation, helplessness – nobody wants to feel any of these. **Each of these emotions is a boon given by Ishvara.** Because each one is a symptom of something deeper that we can get in touch with and resolve. They arise because of some faulty ways of thinking. Not a big deal – we can correct the thinking. Nothing needs to be rejected. See the dance of emotions in your life and dance with it. Take responsibility for your own emotional health.

It is important to handle yourself with kindness. Talk to yourself kindly. Not in an interrogative way, and definitely not in lecture mode! Show that you understand. When you are feeling upset and low, instead of reacting with harshness, first acknowledge the low feeling. Then try to ask yourself what you can do that is reasonable and will help you feel better. Perhaps an ice cream will do the trick – perhaps a nap will. Perhaps silence will. You give yourself that opportunity to recover. The more kind and caring you are to yourself, you will find that you are kind and caring towards others as well. You can't help it! Kindness is very contagious. Earlier you thought others were responsible for your security. Now you grow up and see that it's not others, but I who am responsible for my security. Others contribute, but I am the main person in-charge of my own emotional security.

More likely than not, if we look back at our lives we will find that yes we did indeed show amazing emotional toughness on more than one occasion! The story of each life journey is filled with twists, turns, odds overcome, losses and triumphs – and if marketed correctly, each one can be a best seller for sure! How can we be sure? Because we are still here! Alive and kicking! This is an indication of our emotional toughness and emotional strength. If we don't focus on the toughness and only focus on emotional security (feeling loved and accepted), then we run the risk of being a namby-pamby who melts at every turn. Even at viral videos of cats hugging dogs on the internet!
Emotional security, toughness and health – each aspect is important and cannot be neglected. Like the legs of a three-legged stool. You cannot ignore one and expect the stool to be stable.

It is important to remember that the three aspects – emotional security, toughness and health always go hand in hand. If you have too much emotional toughness, you may become dismissive of other people's emotions. You feel you have "been there, done that", and have no patience for the other person's process. This indicates that you have some beliefs that need to be challenged. Perhaps that the other is just being touchy. Your emotional health needs work.

In the early days of my career as a psychologist, I had just started working with street children, and I remember crying a lot. Nothing I did seemed to get through to them! My responsibility was to offer them emotional support so that they are able to make something of their present and then eventually their future. But these kids have faced rejection from those closest to them and they don't want to trust anyone. My other counselling clients (who came from families) were doing very well. Very little intervention

was needed and they would be fine after a few sessions. Then I am confronted with this bunch! They are fun to hang out with – but they fundamentally do not trust. All the efforts at building rapport and so on seemed futile. This made me feel extremely helpless. They would call me "didi" (hindi for elder sister) and "mummy" and this made me feel like a mother. Like the adult responsible for their wellbeing. My heart would ache. They were young, many had wounds and STDs - they were in dangerous situations. Most could not trust anyone (and so could not be given real help) and even the ones who wanted to trust me would fight among themselves over my attention. It was a madhouse. Eventually, I was able to channel the helplessness I felt into a resolve to do whatever I can. Instead of sinking in the feeling of helplessness, I was able to rise above it and use the emotion to find ways to make a difference in their lives. I was determined to do what I could – with the shakti-s given to me. And whatever powers I did not have, I would consult someone who did and could help. Perhaps I could not help the current set, but surely I would help others. And indeed I was able to be an instrument through which thousands of street children were helped by the work we did. If I had allowed myself to be overwhelmed by helplessness, it would not have helped me or the kids I was trying to help. If it were n't for my helplessness, I may not have tried as hard as I did, either!

Any negative emotion can be channelized to be used as a fertilizer for your own growth as well as the growth of another. I am so glad Arjuna felt sadness. Yes the sorrow that he felt on the battlefield was pertaining to his sadness at being at war with his family, but it was also **a pointer to a deeper sorrow that exists in every human heart.** Were it not for that sorrow, he would not have sought Krishna's help and we would not have the Bhagavad Gita.

Any emotion you are struggling with - be it jealousy, or sorrow, or anger, or helplessness – is wonderful and you can recognize it as the glory of Ishvara and welcome it. Of course excitement, enthusiasm, happiness are welcome – these emotions are contagious and help you bring a cheerfulness wherever you go. Whether we classify an emotion as positive or negative, they are all integral to our growth. They are integral to the fulfilment that we all seek and experience. The strength of a soldier's patriotism is such that it inspires him to lay his life on the line for his country, and countrymen he has never met. Emotion is not a bad thing. Infact, if you allow yourself to welcome it, **any emotion can bring out the best in you.** Even fear! For one, it keeps us from taking unnecessary risks. If fear comes from insecurity, then it also gives us an opportunity to look deeper into the symptom and grow. See that the fear is not objective, just comes from emotional insecurity and work towards avoiding the pitfall of an emotional buildup. So even fear can be welcomed and harnessed. **There is no need to avoid or resist any emotion.**

We see that in resisting an emotion, we are resisting Ishvara's Srishti.
We don't judge ourselves on the basis of emotion.
It is after all the glory of Ishvara.

Bhagavan Shiva is depicted as a Guru in the form of Lord Dakshinamurti. In this representation, there is a small being under his foot who looks like an Asura. This Asura is called "Apasmara" and is carrying a dagger that looks like it could cause trouble! Yet, he is very firmly kept under Dakshinamurti's foot. This signifies the unconscious. **All the work one does aligning "Jeeva Srishti" with "Ishvara Srishti" is done at the level of the**

conscious mind. And the more one deals with issues at the conscious level, the safer one feels. At this point, that which was buried deeper in the subconscious starts to emerge a little at a time. This burial mechanism is a protective one given to each of us by Ishvara Srishti. Once it emerges, it must be dealt with.

Any uncomfortable emotion, like sadness, can be seen an invitation to look into it. An invitation to get comfortable with it and correct the thinking surrounding it. Or even an invitation to allow it to stay a while and run its course. Without being judgemental.
Once you remember that,

You are bigger than every emotion, bigger than every thought, bigger than every desire - nothing can shake you.

There is no need to magnify it and make it more than it is. So let every thought come! Don't hold onto the belief that certain thoughts/emotions/desires are unwelcome. "I should not have these thoughts" – this is the belief. Challenge the belief and check if it aligns with "Ishvara Srishti". Clearly not. Emotions are part of Ishvara Srishti and therefore different emotions will arise in one's mind. If it's possible, one can try to correct one's thinking surrounding the emotion in one's conscious mind. If one is unable to do that, then it could mean that there are persisting *vasanas* (impressions) in the way. No problem – let the emotion come. **Welcome it. Let it have its dance.** It will subside in time. Towards this end, japa is very effective. If you have been given a mantra, regular japa will help you.

In addition, you also have "Saakshi Bhaava". This is a deliberate effort to simply witness your emotions without getting involved. You sit at your meditation seat and allow anything and everything to come up. You just observe your mind. Neither do you hold onto anything nor do you try to manipulate it. You are not judging/labelling it. What has to come will come. And you can deal with it – because you have worked on your emotional security, emotional toughness and emotional health.

My prayers and wishes for you dear reader. I hope you can dance with your emotions! Because emotions are Ishvara Srishti and are always with you. Revel in them and enjoy the beauty that they are. "Taittriya Upanishad" says "*Raso vai saha*".

You are that rasa, that bhava, that Ananda.

If we allow ourselves to feel all emotions without rejecting any part of Ishvara Srishti, then we are better equipped for understanding our nature, our reality, as Ananda. It is this reality that sustains all emotions. So you can be miserable and still be Ananda! Your nature is not threatened by any emotion that comes up. Bring it on!

Closing Prayers

If you found any of this helpful, do spare a moment and write to
Swaminiji@discoveratma.com to share your reflections.
ll Om sarve bhavantu sukhinah ll