

## Vedanta in one's emotional life



*(This is an edited transcription of a talk given by Swamini Brahmajprajnananda at the Vedic Wisdom Festival 2018, Mumbai, kindly transcribed by Varsha Shankar)*

Link to watch -

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLaFUipBXpeY6MZW85iAjzz4pYpKHLfa3P>

There is a story of a wave in the Indian ocean. Like many other waves, it is struggling to be significant. It struggles because it gets pushed around a lot and doesn't quite know how to navigate life. This wave is approached by a friendly person who says - *"Hey, you need to go to a life coach. Somebody who will help you to feel more connected. Because here you are, feeling isolated; not connected. You don't feel anybody understands you. So let me take you to this life coach."* The life coach is another wave.

So this little wave goes to the life coach, and the life coach helps the wave to discover a sense of connectedness. The coach helps him see that yes he is a wave, but he is connected to the rest of the waves and in fact is a part of the ocean. The wave feels a little better after listening to the coach. Life goes on, and the wave finds that he is still struggling. He wonders if there is a way out? He sees that even the life coach he went to, has the same set of struggles. *"The coach too has gone through 3 divorces! I am not sure his advice is good enough for me. There has to be something more"*

Then, an Indian Guru come along. The Guru asks the wave *"Who are you? Introduce yourself"*

The little wave says, *"Don't you see me ? I am just a little wave. I am struggling. Tell me something. Give me a meditative technique. I want to discover myself"*.

The guru says *"Shut up!"*. The wave is taken aback! He thinks, *"What a rude Guru!, He said "Shut up" to me! With all the life coaching advice I have had! I am a high achiever! How dare he!"*. Still, for the sake of propriety, the wave was quiet. The guru continued, *"All your struggles, all the sorrow that you are experiencing is valid. But it belongs to the form that you have. What you really are, is water. What we call wave is just a form, but your identity as a wave (as a being) draws its reality from what is unchanging. It is water! Yes you are a part of the ocean, but your roles, your identities, your relationships, your labels, all the names you call yourself and all the names other people call you - they don't have an independent reality. You, are water. You didn't have a date of birth. You don't have a date of death. You are always around. You always are. In your experience you did have a date of birth and then one day you will die, but you are not going anywhere. You are here."*

The wave said, *"Really?! I feel good when I hear this - I am always going to be around! No ..... You are just being nice to me"*. The guru replied *"No, I am telling you the truth, and the truth is friendly!"*

So this wave, in time, lived happily ever after.

**The journey of the wave is the journey of our lives as we travel through our emotions and form a healthy relationship with the mind.**

Looking at Vedanta in one's emotional life, I want to talk about 3 stages of one's understanding and relationship with the mind:

**Stage 1: My mind is a problem. I have to deal with my mind.**

Nothing much to be said about this; It is our experience!.

**Stage 2: My mind is a glory, a vibhuti an instrument for my life's pursuits. It has been given to me.**

In fact the sophistication of our culture is such that we have a brilliant word for our mind - Antahkarana. Antah as in "inner" and Karana as in "instrument". An inner instrument, (or for that matter the bahya karana - the body) does not operate on its own. Somebody has to be there to operate the instrument. So the second stage of one's emotional growth in the light of Vedanta, is to see your mind as an instrument - to see it as Ishvara's glory. You use this instrument for whatever are your pursuits. You revel in the way you can use your mind.

**Stage 3: I am free from my mind**

As you progress you begin to see, that you are free from the conditions of your mind. And so, you are not defined by your mind. In fact, you are the one that gives reality to the mind.

Therefore, when we are looking at our emotional life in the light of Vedanta, this is the growth we need to have. Moving from "My mind is a problem" to "My mind is an instrument", and then finally to "I am free from my mind".

Now the question is, how might one go about this?

We need to pay attention to 5 areas which help us to move from stage 1 to stage 2 of relating with the mind. Stage 3 of relating to the mind - I am free from the mind, requires systematic exposure to Vedanta.

All five areas are very important, and some of us may tend to bypass some of them.

1. The first area is **Emotional Expression:**

Our classical dance, music, theatre - all trace their roots to Natya shastra. It is a very beautiful text by Bharata Muni. This text presents a brilliant model of emotions. Emotions is a limiting word - the sanskrit word in bhaava or rasa. Natya Shastra tells us that if you want to be an "evolved being", then you need to be a Suhrud (A person with a sensitive heart).

A heart that can experience all emotions;

No emotions are to be rejected - all are to be embraced.

The purpose of Natyam, or music, or dance is to elicit and evoke these emotions.

If you consider any movie or theatre play that is done well, you will find that it is able to evoke myriad emotions - romance, tragedy, comedy and so on. As you sit to watch with your popcorn, you are putting yourself in an experience where you are allowing yourself to go through the emotions. This experience can be very cathartic, very beautiful. And that is what Natya Shastra did. If you were involved with any classical art, music or dance - you enjoyed the richness of all emotion.

No emotion was considered negative (As is presented in modern western psychology). Every emotion is a symptom of something. All emotions are welcomed. The joy of watching a play or a movie is that you don't hold back. You don't say "I don't want to be angry" or "I am not going to cry"! You are in for the ride. And the reason our culture revels in all emotions, is that you can then see that you are in order. You are in harmony with the whole. You don't make a judgment about yourself based on your emotion.

In fact, even in Ramayana and Mahabharata, we see all the characters that we love and respect (and perhaps can't fully understand!) going through all kinds of emotions. Even though they have a "God" status! This is the beauty of our culture.

So this first area, Emotional Expression, is an area we must all pay attention to. For example, very often we complain - "*You don't give me any time!*". Instead, we could be vulnerable enough to say "*I would like more time from you. Is it possible?*" It doesn't take much to express our need in this way. Yet our default mechanism may be to complain - "*You do not spend any time with me! You are always on the phone, always doing something else*" and so on.

One needs to move from this complaining mode to a mode of expression. There is no emotion that we hesitate in expressing. Appropriately, of course. Appropriate expression is an area one must work on. Some of us tend to be quiet - our challenge is to learn to express more. Some of us may be very verbose! We love the sound of our own voice and do not give anyone else a chance to talk. Then, our challenge is to listen.

To pay attention to what you are feeling and what the other person is feeling is a very important area of growth for all of us and it doesn't happen automatically. It is something to be worked on.

## 2. The second area is **Emotional Security**

A lot of us complain that we are not loved enough. We feel we are not accepted enough. "*I have done so much for my children. I have lived my whole life for my children! and now ? I have to wait for the weekend for that one phone call! And if I call them they will say they are very busy. They say they will call me back. All week I have been waiting to talk to them and see what happens! They don't have the time to talk to me*". The parents don't feel loved because they didn't receive that one phone call.

Whose responsibility is it to feel secure, accepted and loved?

Honestly, it is not someone else's responsibility. Can you recognize that you are loved and that you are accepted - not because other people are nice to you - but because you are lovable ? When someone is loving to you, a transfer of vision takes place, and you see yourself as lovable.

You see what the devata-s have done for you (and are constantly doing for you!) when you see the wind circulating around you. We acknowledge Vayu when we say "*Namaste Vayu. Tvam eva Pratyaksham Brahmaasi*". We are not blind to the

role of the Devata-s in our lives. We see that we are nurtured and cared for, and made to feel secure because this is how the order is.

Let us try to answer the question "How do I feel loved?". If we ask 10 people, we will most likely get 10 different answers. Each of us feels loved differently - through different ways. And others around us may not know what makes us feel loved. Some of us feel loved and accepted when we hear words of appreciation. Some of us feel loved when practical actions are done for us. Some of us feel loved when we are in harmony with everyone around us.

Or I see myself as lovable.

This area, emotional security, is an area for us to pay attention to. One of my students would say in his own inimitable, honest (and crude!) way - "I used to behave as if the world was one giant breast and I am the one suckling! I wanted security from anything and everything. I was always waiting for someone to fill me up!".

**Pujya Swami Dayananda ji rightly said,  
"Only the insecure need security .... and no security, is secure enough".**

So if I am waiting for the job, and the relationship, and the time spent with the husband, and the time spent with the children and so on to fill me up and make me feel more secure, then yes it will work for sometime but it is insecure by nature. On the other hand, when I come into a relationship with Bhagavan, I begin to discover a certain emotional security, a maturity.

### 3. The third area is **Emotional Health**

All of us who have lived 15-20 years of our lives have picked up a lot of hurt and guilt. Hurt primarily because of what people have done (or not done!) to you. And guilt because of what you did. *"I really should not have had that affair. I hurt my partner so much. I never thought through the consequences"*. You did what you did given whatever experiences and wisdom you had at that point in time. This is something we cannot escape. Hurt and guilt piles up very nicely because nobody can see what is happening in your mind. You don't have to prove to the world that your hurt and guilt is resolved. A lot of your hurt and guilt gives you identity! You can say "I am the suffering one. I did the right thing but see how people treated me" and so on.

Most of the time, we are looking for some emotional closure because the mind has a brilliant capacity to play things on loop. The same incomplete conversation will go on and on and on - while you look at the situation from different angles

and analyze what you could and should have said. This loop does not give closure.

Emotional health is something we must pay attention to along with physical health. Nobody is going to do this for you. But it needs to be done. Not for anyone else's sake - certainly not for god's sake! But for your own sake!. And there are definite ways in which you can process some of the hurt and the guilt. This is something that needs to be done.

#### 4. The fourth area is **Emotional Strength**

I had a very interesting experience this year when some of us did the "Giri Valam". This is the parikrama (circumambulation) around Arunachala (also called Tiruvannamalai) hill which is about 14 kms. A couple of us decided to walk bare feet. Most of the road is paved and there are tiny stones also on it. People have spit on the road. There is also garbage strewn. I had a choice. I could either complain about the situation, or, I could have worn footwear as some of the others did, or I take the risk and make the journey bare feet. The choice was mine. All of us have had enough and more instances in our lives where we have shown tremendous resilience and tremendous strength. That strength may have come from the support of our parents, or it may have come from some inspirational statements made by sports figures, or it may have come from some belief in ourselves - it can have come from anywhere.

I remember one thing that played a big role in my life - my father used to tell my brother and me, "tum sher ke bacche ho! (Loose translation - you are children of tigers). Meaning, you are leaders and you are fearless! As a child this had a big impact on me. I felt I could handle anything. And it sowed the seed for a lot of courage in both of us. Like this, many of us have words that have inspired us. Or perhaps when the going got tough, you got going! And you discovered a certain resilience and strength in you.

A part of one's emotional growth is to take a deep look at the strength you have. In fact we use a word called "Titiksha" which is an important qualification in Vedanta - You are able to put up with what the situation is.

We have instances where we have shown great strength and resilience, belief in yourself. You lead and there is no fear. Look at the strength you have. You have strength to put up with whatever life throws at you.

If I have pushed my boundaries, the shakti-s given to me, then I am fulfilled in life. To be fulfilled, see what you want to contribute. Then blessings will pour. You see that Isvara kripa is with you, to do what you can. All that I can do is

thanks to Isvara shakti only. Doing helps my mind to be prepared. I master my mind.

5. The fifth area is **Emotional Independence**

When you start paying attention to the above four areas of your life, you find that you are bigger than all your emotions. No emotion can get the better of you. This leads to emotional independence.

The toy that was something you could not do without when you were five years old, was forgotten and put away when you were seven. Earlier that same toy was taken wherever I went - it was a part of my entourage! But at the age of seven, you had grown out of your need for that toy. As we go through life, certain things drop off. The value that you attached to something is no longer felt. It doesn't mean the value you had earlier attached, was in some way less or not authentic. Now you have grown bigger than your association (perhaps attachment) to that thing.

When you look at the different emotions that you through - like disgust, excitement, cheerfulness, love (which is more than emotion - but it has an aspect of emotion), anger, sadness, irritation - you see that you are independent of all of them.

The typical question asked by psychologists and journalists (regardless of whether you are returning from a party or a victim of an earthquake!) is the same - "How do you feel?". And you do know what you are feeling. Even if you feel confused about what you are going through - you will be able to articulate that feeling. How do you know how you feel? Because the feelings are in your mind.

So the journey in one's emotional life in the light of Vedanta, is to first grow from stage one to stage two. Earlier I thought my mind was a problem, but now as I start to use my mind and live up to the meaning of the word anthahkarana. I start to pay attention to all these areas of my life.

I pay attention to my emotional expression, emotional health, emotional security, emotional strength and emotional independence.

And whatever emotion comes up, I am ok.

**The knowledge is not "I have a thought free mind". The knowledge of Vedanta is**

**"I am free from the conditions of the mind".**

Real emotional independence will help you see “my mind is different from me”. When you see an elephant, you know that you have only seen an elephant. You do not become the elephant! This is true for whatever you may see. When you see a sad thought though, what happens? You could become sad. Or, you could see it as something independent of you. You see it, and that's it. Nothing more!.

The wave is now growing up! It sees that all these emotions are being evoked in him, but he is free from them. In fact, the wave is so free that he can afford to have any and every emotion. Bring it on, he says! “I can handle anything”. Why ? Because you see that you are greater than every emotion.

You see that you are greater than all your identities.

All the labels; All the emotional experiences.

How are you able to see this ? What is this *divya drishti* (divine sight) ? Is it gained by some *shakti* path. The wave doesn't need any of this.

The wave needs to see that it is water.

Meditative techniques will help, but unless you see your real identity, your identity will now be “I am the meditator”, still identified with your form. It is similar to the same problem that the wave had to start with.

So we are moving from *praatibhasika satyam* (Subjective reality). My starting point is that “my mind is a problem, the world is a problem”. Whatever is your world view, or your view about a particular thing/community/object - that is your “*jiva srishti*”. So there is an objective world out there and there is your world, which is biased to your world view. For example if you think Gujarati-s are foodies, then you see them as very knowledgeable about good food and you may take recommendations and tips from them. So in your “*jiva srishti*”, Gujarati-s are foodies. Someone else may totally disagree with you.

Our aim is to move from this “*jiva srishti*” because we see that it is totally subjective. And there is a lot of sorrow because where there is “*jiva srishti*” there is subjectivity and isolation. And a constant effort to connect so that you feel less alienated. That's the struggle. Move towards what then? We move towards “*Ishvara srishti*”. As you start living in “*Ishvara Srishti*”, you see that you were always connected! *Ishvara* is not up there somewhere - *Ishvara* is right here.



As you relate to people and situations, you start to live in "Ishvara Srishti" by paying attention to all these areas of emotional growth. If you bypass any one area then you will have a problem. Someone may say "No more emotional expression for me. I will focus on strength". But then those around that person will not understand him. If you focus too much on expression and not enough on resilience, then again there will be a problem. If you focus only on emotional security, then you will feel hurt all the time! You need to focus on all the areas. And most importantly you need to see that you are independent of all your emotions.

That is the journey. From "jiva srishti" to "Ishvara srishti". And the third stage is "paaramaarthika drishtya" - from the standpoint of absolute reality, you can afford to have any and every emotion. You are free. You were always free.

In the tenth chapter of the Gita, Bhagavan Krishna says:

*Buddhirjnaanam asammohaha kshamaa satyam damashamaha*

*sukham dukham bhavo bhaavaha bhayam chha abhayamevacha*

*Ahimsa samata tushtihi tapo daanam yashoyashaha*

*Bhavanti bhaava bhootanam matta eva prithag vidhaaha*

He is pointing out to different emotions and dispositions. And he is saying "mattah eva" - they all come from me. "Prithag vidhaaha" - they are all different. I am in-and-through your whole emotional landscape. You may have some of each emotion in small measure, some in larger measure. Whatever measure you have, I am in-and-through all of it. So there is nothing to reject. And everything is to be embraced.

Om tat sat.

### **Postscript at the end of the talk:**

One last point to be made about emotions is that you should not make emotions a whipping boy. When you are close to a person you don't talk to them only about the rate of inflation, what should happen in national politics, so on and so forth!

You share emotions!

Patriotism is an emotion. So is motivation. And happiness in its many manifestations! We love emotions! We enjoy the excitement and cheerfulness and the whole gamut. Please don't say "I have a problem with emotions". That is not a correct statement. You

don't have a problem with emotions. Some emotions have to be recognised and maybe dealt with. That's all. The other emotions you enjoy! It is a vibhuti!

Recognize it to be a blessing from Ishvara.

### Question Session

1) Where do our myriad emotions come from ? What is their origin ?

Ans: All emotions are a gift from Bhagavan. You can make your efforts to have less or more, but if you are a living being, then emotions are a part of the territory. You can't deny it. You can't fight emotion with emotion either. Why does a fire burn ? Because that is its nature. When we talk about a human being, emotions are very much a part of the mind. You cannot take it out. It is a part of you. So we learn to enjoy it.

2) I feel like a stuck record. I am stuck in something that has happened in the past. What should I do ?

Ans: Whenever we are stuck with the past, it is generally because it is an unfinished situation. And in all likelihood there is a person involved. Some person who should have done something more, or should have done something less.

To deal with this, we use a two pronged approach.

First, we use a simple method which is as follows. You take a photograph of the person, or you imagine the person sitting on a chair and write down all the things that you want to say to that person. Uncensored. And then see what happens. Because, somewhere when we play these things on a loop in our minds, we are editing our thoughts. What we tend to do (and we are brilliant at it!), is that we react to a reaction. For example - I am very angry about something. Then immediately a voice in my head will say "You shouldn't be angry! You are a spiritual student!". Sometimes this so-called "spirituality" can really mess up people. Now I have more guilt because I am not supposed to be angry!

So first, you relax. You try and complete the situation. And you will find that you will be able to process something.

And secondly, you will have to find a sense of purpose and meaning in your life. Some of us tend to ruminate more in the past because we don't have anything to look forward

to in the future. The past is always there to rehash. Instead, focus on what you have to give meaning to your life now.

3) Do affirmations work ?

Ans. Affirmations are statements that are presented in a positive way. They are a statement of reality.

Earlier I thought I was a good for nothing and even my partner confirmed that. Now I see that I am significant. I am doing my best and I am thriving. These are statements of reality. You are not faking anything. So a reminder to oneself is a very good thing, and affirmations do work. But the problem is that affirmations are presented as total solutions that will do the trick for you. This is not true. More work is required. You do the affirmation, but alongside, you channelize it into action as well. That piece is very important.

4) Do mantras have any effect on emotions ? How about breathing patterns ?

Ans. Definitely. The emotions are part of your antahkarana. Your sukshma sharira (subtle body) includes your prana as well. As Ramana Maharishi says very beautifully in Upadesha Saram, when you regulate your breath you will find that your manas sthithi also gets regulated. This is an ancient practice that we have of observing one's breath, observing one's emotions and so forth.

Mantras are words that are revealed by Ishvara. They are treated with respect. And mantras given by a guru have a certain potency because the guru would have chanted it several times (as is the practice) before giving it to you. And mantras work. But, if you are looking for a guarantee, mantras will not work unless your intention is clear and unless your actions are clear. All in line with dharma. So before you start chanting any mantra, always check with a trusted source as to what is the right mantra for you to chant. Just randomly downloading something from the web and trying to raise the kundalini will not work. It can create problems for you. So seek the right guidance.

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