

BANDAGI BICHAR
(THE PHILOSOPHY OF BANDAGI SALUTATION)

By Prakashmani Nam Saheb (1945 – 1962)

Late Hazur of Kabir Panth, Acharya of Sadguru Kabir Prakatya Dham,
Varanasi- India

The Importance of Courtesy

In all the religions, to salute (greet) and to be saluted in return, i.e. salutation and blessing, is in common practice. Salutation is also called courtesy. Salutation is a part of the nine-fold *bhakti* (devotion) explained in the *Bhagavatam*. Courtesy indicates simplicity of mind, humility and freedom from ego. Bowing of the head indicates humility of the mind. Humility is such a behaviour that it makes others humble also. Courtesy quickly solves many difficult problems of the world. As a result, for worldly and spiritual success, humility is very important. In the following *sakhi*, Satguru Kabir explains the greatness of humility in a very beautiful way:

*Water cannot stand at a high place, but will gather in a low place.
He who bends low drinks to his satisfaction and he who stands high goes thirsty.*

A person in front of a *mahatma* (great soul) and scholars becomes humble due to his humility. He attains noble qualities from them, but the person who, being egotistic, does not show courtesy, remains 'empty' or foolish forever. One's humility can subdue others. The poet Rahim explains in one of his verses:

Why doesn't one understand, thinking carefully, that man is not difficult to influence? Even God is influenced by the devotee who has humility.

The person who is humble and keeps his mind subdued, even if misfortunes befall him by some adversities, they cannot stay with him for a long time.

*Guru Nanak says to remain small always as the dub grass remains small.
The tall grass will burn but the small grass will flourish.*

It is clear from this verse that the nature of salutation is the beauty of human life. Though in all the different religions the word and form of salutation are different, the common element in all is to indicate the superiority of the other and the humility of oneself. The function of head and hand is common in all. That means that in all the ways of salutation, the person who salutes indicates his humility and the superiority of the person whom he salutes. Without integrity of mind, salutation has no value.

*There is a big difference between one bowing down
and another, and there are different ways of bowing down.
These three bow down too much - the cheetah, the thief and
the bow. (The cheetah bows low in order to steal up to its*

prey; the thief bows low so as not to be seen, and the bow when pulled is bent but shoots an arrow to kill).

In the name of bowing down the cheetah, the thief and the bow, bow enough but their bowing is to take the life of others. In the same way if one is humble, due to selfish motives, it is to cheat others. Those people who have the nature of the crane and the cat show too much humbleness; thus, seeing their false humility, one should not get fooled. (The crane stands very still showing attentiveness as if in meditation, but it pounces on the innocent fish. The cat is similarly stealthy to get the mouse.)

The person who pretends to be religious but is always greedy and hypocritical, but pretends to be free of them, kills others. He becomes friendly to all. All of these should be known as having the nature of the cat. Just as the cat becomes low, in order to pounce on a rat, just so, the people who pretend to be humble do so to further their own personal motives. The religious person who keeps his eyes downcast, doing nothing, and bent upon his selfish motive cheats, and is falsely humble. He follows the nature of the crane. He keeps his eyes downcast always to show his false humility. He remains inactive and his mind is one-pointed towards selfish motives. He cheats and shows his false humility. This type of religious person is said to have the nature of the crane because the crane, in order to catch the fish, becomes very humble (is very still as if in meditation). So behave the selfish people.

The Specialty Of Bandagi From Other Salutations

In fact, all the salutations offered with purity of mind are good, but in them too, that form of salutation is the best which shows a great deal of feeling and love. Amongst us, the followers of Kabir Saheb, the Bandagi is full of feeling. Bandagi is as follows: Sitting in the *uttan asan* (sitting on the heels) with hands folded on the ground, bow the head fully and repeat *bandagi saheb* three times. For the devotee this is the special way; the man takes off his turban or cap and puts it on the ground. He then places his folded hands upon the turban or cap and says *bandagi saheb*. For the lady, she spreads her *anchal* (scarf) on the ground and then puts her folded hands on it and says *bandagi saheb*. By doing *bandagi* in this way one attains nearness to God and his refuge. He offers himself to God. All these are marks of *bandagi* performed in this special way. Taking off the turban or cap when one says *bandagi saheb* indicates the devotee's coming to the refuge of God and offering himself to Him. This is explained by the great poet Kalidas in his renowned book: *Raghu Vansh* in the fourth chapter:

They who took off the coverings of their heads came to His refuge (when Raghu defeated the enemies they took off their head coverings and bowed down to Him).

The spirit of *Upasana* (devotion) is clear from these words:

Surrender yourself to the form of the guru; keep his form always in your heart, and have vision of him in the morning and evening at the time of prayers.

At the time of saying *bandagi saheb*, it is proper for the devotee to keep the guru's form in his mind, and he should have full vision of him from head to toes with open eyes (the vision of the guru should be such as if one is seeing him with open eyes). To put the head on the folded hands shows that the devotee has offered his head to him.

I offer salutation in front of the examiner (guru), offering my head by putting it on my hands. With true love I recite the words *Bandagi Saheb*.

Sacrifice of the head! Who except the brave can offer it? It is said that the Hansa (Soul) should be perfect in five qualities, and bravery is one of them. As long as man does not have bravery in him, none of his action will reach perfection.

It does not matter is you are far away from your master; offer your head in sacrifice and you will be near him. (Do not mind if devotion is difficult; offer yourself and it becomes easy.)

The devotee will not succeed as long as he does not offer his head to his master. The way of devotion is so difficult that only a brave and patient person can practice it. Paying attention to the traditions of clan and the restrictions of caste are external enemies of devotion. Lust, anger, greed, jealousy, ego and ignorance are its internal enemies. Except for a really brave person, who else can conquer all of these enemies?

*Lustful, angry and greedy people cannot succeed in devotion; a rare brave person, renouncing the ego of his caste and clan, will be able to practice it.
Devotion is the bride of Ram, a coward cannot attain it.
The person who takes his head into his hands, can recite the name of God.*

Such brave persons who have their heads in their hands to sacrifice, can bring revolution to the society for good, as is stated in this couplet:

If the brave are in a small number even then they are enough, because they make steady the path of truth. If they are in a large number, they are of no use just as the plentiful cranes in the rainy season (they selfishly catch the fish and fly away).

To face the tyranny of the tyrant is the job of a brave person. Saint Nabhaji in his book 'Bhakt Mal' explains that the devotees are saint soldiers of the Lord:

In kali yug (Iron Age) holding their hands up, the military of the saints attacked the evils of society". And: "The person who confronts lust and anger is a great soldier.

To offer the head in sacrifice means to renounce the ego as in this couplet:

If one attains knowledge from the guru, he should offer his head in return (his ego and passions). Many foolish people, keeping ego in their lives, have been washed away by the currents of bhowsagar (this world of rebirths).

The current of ignorance is very difficult to control. The whole world is being washed away by it. The disciple is the first giver who offers his mind, body and head to the guru. The guru is the second giver who gives the name of the Lord in return.

Because the Hindus and the Muslims were following opposite paths, Sat Guru Kabir introduced the middle path which was acceptable to both groups.

Guru Kabir introduced one way out of two. The cowards are scared of it, and the brave appreciate it.

It is advised by Sanskrit poets that one should follow the middle path. One should try to avoid extremes of everything. It is certain and decided that whatever is truth is also beneficial for the two worlds (here and the hereafter)

*If I say that I am a Hindu I am not that: I am also not a Muslim.
I am a combination of five elements. The Invisible Power dwells in me.*

This was the reason that words of Sanskrit and Persian were used in the sayings of Kabir. *Bandagi Saheb* is such a word where Sanskrit and Persian words are mixed - *vandana* from Sanskrit and *saheb* from Persian. In these two words *bandagi* is pure Sanskrit. It derives from the root *vadi* which means salutation and glorification. The meaning of *bandagi* is to salute. Though Muslims use the word *bandagi* as a Persian word, it derives from the Sanskrit root. *Bandagi* is a derived word from the pure word called *Vandana* or salutation. *Saheb* belongs to Persian. It means master or a noble person as in the saying of Tulsi Das: *Sita Nath is my master (Saheb) and Tulsi Das is a servant. Saheb in bandagi saheb is an addressing word. In short the meaning of bandagi saheb is: "O my master! I offer salutation to you".*

According to the tradition of a country, the word *saheb* can be used before or after *bandagi*. In the Eastern part of India people say *Saheb Bandagi*, and in the Western part people mostly say *Bandagi Saheb*. Both are proper. With the idea of addressing someone, *Saheb* should be uttered before *Bandagi*.

With these explanations it should be clear to our brother devotees that the word is from Sanskrit. Some of our un-informed brothers, due to communal feelings, or feeling of shame, in the place of *Bandagi Saheb* they have started to write only *vandana*. The cause of their shame is that they feel that *Bandagi* is a Muslim word. I hope that by this, my

writing, they may change their feelings, and in the future they will not spread such undisciplined and self-made ideas.

One should offer prostrate salutation to the guru or *mahant* with all parts of the body touching the floor.

Kabir said:

Know your guru as Govind (God), and remain in the recitation of satnam.

When one meets his guru he should offer prostrate *bandagi*, otherwise he should meditate upon the guru every moment.

Who should be saluted first and who second?

Grace of the guru is the highest of all, so on his appearance or that of the *mahant*, the guru deserves to be saluted first. Guru and Govind both stand in front of the devotee; to whom should he do salutation first? It was the grace of the guru who taught the way to obtain God, so guru should be saluted first. This is the tradition. One may or may not follow it is another matter. Manu said the same thing:

There are three categories of knowledge - worldly, scriptural, and spiritual. From whom man obtains this knowledge it is better to salute him first.

In the presence of many, whoever is above all in knowledge and meditation should be saluted. Offer your salutation to the discriminative knowledge. Form can be attained by many, but abandon that salutation where there is no knowledge of *shabda* (Word).

Manu stated:

There are five things which deserve respect and they are wealth, relation, age, action and knowledge. Relation is better than wealth and age is better than relations. Knowledge is the best of all.

Manu stated that because his head is white, that is not a sign of age, if he is not knowledgeable. If a person in youth acquires knowledge, he is said to have grown up. Amongst the knowledgeable, the meditators and scholars, whoever, giving up ego, salutes first and says *bandagi*, he is the best of all.

Couplet:

Whoever salutes first is the guru and who salutes second is the disciple (needs knowledge). It is not good to salute because you see someone else saluting. Whoever salutes by watching others is said to have useless vision (cannot inspire others).

It is foolish to think himself lower by saluting first amongst the people of his level of accomplishment. Many religious leaders have the same misconception. If they come and by chance, get together, they do not offer *bandagi* to one another first. The writer has himself experienced this type of behaviour.