

ACCOMMODATING OTHERS¹

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Vedanta is the teaching of the reality of oneself. It is in the form of an inquiry wherein one discovers the real meaning of the word 'I', the self that remains unchanged from childhood to youth to old age. It leads one to discover that the unchanged self is free from any form of limitation. To recognise and own this wholeness one requires a prepared mind. For the one with an unprepared mind, Vedanta is like calculus for a person who is still learning basic mathematics. In Vedanta the prepared mind is one that has, in relative measure, what it seeks to discover in the absolute sense. If the self is absolute contentment, then the mind of the seeker must be relatively content. If the self is absolute love, then the seeker must be a relatively loving person, a person who happily accepts people and things as they are.

To gain such a mind implies the recognition, the importance and the understanding of certain values and attitudes. For instance, accommodating others is one such value. In fact, anger is due to lack of accommodation. If you expect the world to conform to your liking, then it is your own expectation that brings anger to you. Accommodation is an understanding that the other person behaves as he or she does because the person cannot act contrary to his or her background. You have no right to expect something different from someone just because it suits your needs. If you think you have a right to ask someone to change, then that person equally has the right to ask you to let him or her live as he or she does. In fact, only by accommodating others, allowing them to be what they are, do you gain a relative freedom in your day-to-day life.

In many ways, everyone interferes in everyone else's life. Everyone creates a global effect by his or her actions. Ordinarily we just look at things from a small perspective, and find the person we are angry with looming large before us. In fact, we are never free from anyone's influence or from all the forces in the universe; nor can we perform an action without affecting everyone else. Even our statements will affect others. Therefore, our freedom needs to include the fact

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that we are all interrelated.

Even the Swami is not free. A couple passed by when I was at a zoo, and the man remarked to his partner, "Look at this one." I was the one with these strange clothes to be looked at. People often make such comments. I try not to disturb people, but it seems that my clothes, the traditional robes of a renunciate, cause a slight disturbance. I have made a decision, and it will definitely affect others. If I am disturbed by others' comments, then I gain only as much freedom as they grant me. However, if I reverse the process, if I give the freedom to others to be what they are, to that extent I am free. So I do not argue with them. My freedom is the freedom that I give to them to have their opinion about me, which is different from the fact. Thus, there are benefits in accommodating people as they are.

If someone makes a comment about you, allow him to do so. If the comment is not true, you usually try to justify your actions and prove him wrong. If you are objective, you will try to see if there is any validity in his criticism of you. If he has put you down for his own security, give him that freedom and then you are free. What tightening can you do to a bolt when the threads are not there? The world can disturb you only to the extent you allow the world to disturb you. You do not allow the world to disturb you if you give the world the freedom to do what it wants within the rule of society. By changing yourself totally in this way you gain, according to your value for accommodation, relatively abiding contentment and freedom.

Practising accommodation you come to terms with yourself psychologically, with yourself as a personality. That is what we call *yoga-sādhana*. Look back at the situations, the people and events that disturbed you in your life. They are not mere memories but remnants of reactions. A reaction is not something you do consciously. You cannot consciously get angry, because anger is not an action but a reaction that takes place, something you have no control over. Reactions create a great impact on you and become part of your psyche. They are aspects of the personality of a person. In fact, they are false, born of a lack of alertness on your part. Memory itself is not unpleasant. Unpleasantness is there in your mind because of lingering reactions and emotions, which have become as though real. Therefore, recall those people and moments that caused you pain. Perhaps, you carry guilt because of some hurt you caused another. In the seat of meditation recall them all and let them be as they are. With patience you free yourself from all residuals of the reactions.

When you look at the blue sky and the stars, or the birds and mountains, you have no complaints about them and you are happy. You see the rocks on the riverbed; they did not do anything to please you. Yet you are happy because you accept them as they are, and therefore you are pleased. The river flows in its own way; it does not bother you, if you do not expect its fullness to be greater or to flow in a different direction. In fact, you seek out natural spots because they do not invoke the displeased person, the angry, the hard-to-please person that you seem to be. They do not strike the demanding chord in you. You are one with the situation, an accommodating self, without the need of the world doing anything to please you.

Thus, you are a pleased person with reference to a few things. It is the wedge you have to create in yourself. When you go to the mountains, the mountains do nothing to please you, but you find you are pleasing to yourself. See how pleased you can be, and bring that pleased person to bear on all situations and people who had displeased you and whom you had displeased at one time or another. Then look at yourself just as you would when you look at nature. Accept others as you accept the stars. Pray for a change if you think you or they need to change, and do what you can to promote change. But accept others first. Only in this way can you really change. Accept others totally and you are free; then you discover love, which is yourself.