

The Attitude of Kṣānti

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kṣānti is generally translated as forbearance or forgiveness. Such a definition, however, connotes arrogance. Who are you to forgive someone else? Forgiveness implies a “holier than thou” attitude which only stems from pride. And so, to forgive someone is not what is meant by *kṣānti*.

A more meaningful translation is letting people live as they do, and letting situations be as they are without wanting them to be different. The value of *kṣānti* is accommodation – a very beautiful human embellishment which takes a certain inner richness. Unless you are big enough inside, it is not possible to accommodate another person or a situation. In the list of values to be cultivated, I would say that *kṣānti* is the most important attitude for the seeker who really wants to understand Vedanta.

One must enjoy a relative degree of accommodation in order to discover the *ātmā*, the self, which accommodates the entire world. *ātmā* accommodates ignorance, it accommodates error, it accommodates jealousy, it accommodates passion, it accommodates anger, it accommodates the world with all its limitations. The self accommodates all the pairs of opposites. In *kāthopaniṣad* the *ātmā* is given the name *anumanta*, which means the great permitter. *Ātmā* permits or accommodates everything because it is unopposed to anything.

Thus, to know the *ātmā* which is non-separate from myself, my mind should enjoy the capacity to accommodate. To the extent that one has the capacity to accommodate, to that extent one is objective. Accommodation is an inner disposition which has nothing to do with suffering or enduring the wrongdoing of other people. One does not accommodate a person’s wrongdoing. One simply chooses not to internalize whatever the person has said or done and instead allows the person to be as he or she is.

We generally internalize external situations. For example, when someone says something to you that is insulting or offensive, the tendency is to painfully swallow it. Getting hurt by what someone has said or done is called internalization.

When such a situation arises, there are number of ways you can respond. That is up to you. But if you don’t allow the external situation to hurt you, then you have a heart which accommodates. It is a very subtle thing to observe in one’s mind. To enjoy accommodation one must understand that each person – he may be Arjuna or Duryodhana – behaves in a manner in keeping with his background. Everybody has a certain personal history that controls his or her behavior. Whether you know a person’s past or not does not matter, you can still be accommodative in the sense that you can accept that one’s behavior is something that is in keeping with one’s own psychological makeup. A person’s behavior cannot be different from what that person is. And each person is exactly as he or she is because of his or her background.

You may ask what is the difference between accommodation and compassion, sympathy? Compassion is a trait born of accommodation. Daya, compassion, does not happen immediately. What happens first is accommodation which allows you to understand another person and let him or her be, as he or she is.

More often than not we try to control another person's behavior because we find it unacceptable. The attempt to control is in order to feel secure. Even love is misunderstood as control sometimes. Because I love you, I say, "Do this or don't do that". This is strangulation, not love. In love there is accommodation, allowing people to be what they are.

If you want to help a person, you can do so only by first accommodating him. It is something like being a good doctor. When the patient comes to see the doctor, the doctor cannot complain that every day people come to him complaining about one thing or another. Patients go to see a doctor because they have problems. A doctor can deal with a patient only when he first has accommodation. First he accepts the person with his illness, and then afterwards, he does what he must.

This is true in life too; people are people. You take them as they are. In fact, your freedom lies only in this. The more you allow people to be what they are, the more you are free inside. Many of our problems like anger, jealousy, and so on arise due to lack of accommodation.

We do experience accommodation with reference to certain things in the world. You do not want to change the stars or the mountains or the trees. You let them as they are. You accommodate them. The same is possible with human beings. They all come from different backgrounds which condition their behavior. You cannot expect them to behave as you want. If I consult those people whom I want to change, they say that I have to change. We try to change each other and tensions develop because each one wants to control the other. This controlling behavior is due to a sense of insecurity.

kṣānti frees you from reactions and allows you to act. Action is possible only when there is *kṣānti*. Reaction is intolerance or incapacity to accept a fact. A situation is a fact, but it is only a fact when I perceive it without a reaction. When I react, I do not see the fact. If I allow the fact to sink into me without the interference of reaction, then I will be able to act. But if I react to a situation, due to a lack of accommodation, I will not be able to respond appropriately. A reaction is the incapacity to accept a fact. Unfortunately, a fact does not consult you. Does sugar consult you to be sweet? A fact is to be understood.

The incapacity to accept a fact expresses in terms of anger, fear, jealousy, sorrow, frustration. Death is something that is very difficult to accept. A person who was there very much alive no longer exists in that particular form. The human mind cannot handle that and has never discovered an easy way of taking death as a fact. But death is a fact - as are old age and disease. There are many facts in life, some of them pleasant, some unpleasant. If you can face them, you are a very mature person.

Unless I have a value for acceptance of facts, I will not make efforts to accept and be able to act accordingly. Reaction is something that happens to me due to my refusal to accept facts. Loss of certain things and the arrival of others become a problem. Either because of the presence of something or the absence of something, I find I am upset. This reaction is lack of accommodation.

Action is what you do, while reaction is what happens to you. That is the reason you cannot be consciously angry. When you have no say over anger, is it an action or reaction? You will only get angry under certain vulnerable situations. It happens.

Action is something that you do either deliberately or spontaneously. An impulsive action is a reaction; it is neither deliberate nor spontaneous. What is a spontaneous action? An action that does not involve thinking, but is proper, is spontaneous.

Now what is an impulsive action? An action which is wrong and done without thinking. All spontaneous and impulsive actions do not imply thinking but one is right and the other is wrong. You cannot say that you kicked someone spontaneously. That is an impulsive reaction. If you understand the difference between an action and a reaction, you learn which situations make you vulnerable.

It is advisable to maintain a journal and record which situations hurt you or made you angry. On reading it, you will find that there is a pattern. That is also getting to know you. If you know the pattern, you are forewarned and can understand your own situation. To understand that pattern is to be free from it.

Only if you understand people and let people be as they are, you can help them. In other words, you have to be free. I allow people to be what they are, situations to be what they are and try to improve them if I find them unpleasant. To do this, I act, not react. From mistakes we can learn but not from reaction.

Thus *kṣānti* is an amazing virtue. It is something that I consider close to *ātmā* at the *antaḥkaraṇa* level because *ātmā* is *anumanta*. It just accommodates everything. It has no designs or manipulations. All these things have no place in one's heart if one can accommodate. Accommodation does not involve an "I am holier than thou" attitude. It is a simple acceptance of facts as they are and doing what one can. That is healthy living, intelligent living. And therefore, *kṣānti* is not a value, but an attitude.

¹ Excerpted from a talk at Coimbatore. Published in the 8th Anniversary Souvenir of the Arsha Vidya Gurukulam, 1994.