

Acceptance (Part I of II)

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Link - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nEW8VcObtsA>

Acceptance is a very deep and profound topic. A topic, if understood well, can really transform one's life. Any mention of acceptance is incomplete without looking at resistance. I want us to be introduced to a very special person, and that is the voice in your head. Imagine you are trying to sleep but you are not able to fall asleep. If you pay attention to this voice, it will be chattering non-stop. Saying *"Ah I am not getting any sleep, maybe I should just watch some video ... but they say that one has to sleep 7-8 hours if I sleep late what will happen? .. I am going to be so groggy in the morning ... I will be so irritable ..why am I not getting sleep? .. this is too much"* This voice is on, all the time. Especially when there are matters of extreme emotion - this voice goes berserk. *"I think I should get married ... no, I am not ready for this, I should wait .. but if I wait too long I might miss out .. etc "*

What we see is, the voice in my head takes both sides of the conversation, and it actually doesn't care which side it takes, as long as it can keep chatting and talking non-stop. If you spend some time observing this voice, then you will notice that it never shuts up. You will see that it is always trying to find a very comfortable place to rest. It doesn't matter if this voice is saying mean things or nice things, or very spiritual things or worldly things - this nonstop voice that goes on and on.

Has the quality of your life improved from this nonstop voice and chatter? If you observe the content of this voice, much of it is a waste of time and energy because the truth is, that most of life will unfold in accordance with forces that are far outside of our control, irrespective of what the mind thinks about it. Some of you may be wondering, who is talking to whom - whose voice is this? This voice is really your voice, you are doing the talking, and you are also doing the listening. None of these voices is more than any of the others. The truth is, that you are aware of this voice.

So, the question is, if you are aware of this voice, and this voice is non-stop, and it causes conflict, and it also helps sometimes in resolving problems, but if much of what the voice is saying is meaningless, or not necessary, then the question is, why does it exist?

It is very interesting to note, we cannot control the world outside. So what this voice does is, it narrates the world for you.

Let's imagine you are driving and you see a lot of trees that are going past, but then you also find a banyan tree *"I love banyan trees .. When was the last banyan tree that I saw? Wouldn't it be*

lovely to take a picture here." What's happening here, is this world is constantly entering me through my senses. And by verbalizing it, you are trying to bring in the experience of the world into the realm of thoughts. Now, you have an external world that you are interacting with, and you also have an inner world. This inner world is an alternative environment but the good news is, it is under your control, or at least you think it is. So the outside world is marching according to its own laws, but you are able to control the experience of reality so that it all fits within your mental models.

If you do not like the way the world is currently, then you verbalize it internally, you judge it, you complain about it, and then you decide what to do about it. It comes from a need to control, a need to feel secure, and a need to feel certain because we are trying to hold on to something that is solid, something that is tangible, because then you are going to feel more secure, certain, and significant. Let us say it is cold right now, it is a sensation, that is it, but the voice is going to say "*oh it's cold right now.. but we are almost home so not to worry .. in a few minutes we will be there, it's not going to be so bad*" Now, because of this narrative, you feel a bit better because you are trying to control the environment with your narrative so that you can try to control the experience. We do this all the time. We think we live in the world outside, but we are actually recreating the world inside on the basis of our likes and dislikes.

So, what is the alternative? If you decide not to narrate and just observe the world, then what will happen? There will be a lot of data that comes in, but you are going to feel a bit open and exposed because reality is too real for us. I repeat, reality is too real for us. And so, we try to calibrate and manipulate reality with our minds. The reason this voice is non stop chattering is because we gave it a job to do. It became a protection mechanism, a form of defense, just to make us secure. But the one who is aware of this voice, is silent. The pure awareness that is aware of this non stop chattering voice is actually silence, but, something to be discovered. Now, imagine if you had to spend a day with this nonstop voice. Suppose you physicalize this voice, and suppose this new personality that is now sitting beside you, and is making a constant comment on everything that you are doing. You are sitting right now in front of the laptop, and you are thinking "*when is she going to start talking about acceptance? oh, I should have made tea, I'm a bit thirsty now...*" Just imagine if this personality was going to talk non stop to you. You would say "Get out! Shut up, I don't want to hear your voice!"

Our attempt to silence this voice has been going on for a long time. That is why yoga asana is very good, because whenever you are doing any kind of absorbing activity, your mind is quiet. In the sense that, this voice is now more focused on getting the alignment right, the balance right, the asana, the pose correctly. So you attribute the peace of mind that you experience to yoga, but actually, it's the voice that has been silenced. Or, when you dance, or sing, or even when you are doing pranayama because it is an absorbing activity, there is not much for the voice to comment on during that time. Of course, the voice takes over much later, but you feel so refreshed for that one hour. During that hour it's not that the problems of your life have disappeared, you still come back to the same problems, but, in having moments like this, we find that there is a possibility of discovering a peace and calm that does not have much to do with your mind.

The Vedic tradition talks a lot about self mastery, self growth, and all the way to self discovery. Some of the yoga practitioners are into this idea of a "no thought state". Imagine you are trying to have this "no thought state", well, the inner voice will have a commentary about it. "*Ok, ok! I think I am approaching this no thought state*", and that's it - that's a new thought - your no thought state is gone!

The tragedy of modern civilization is that most of us think we relax only when we have a drink. We want to knock the mind off somehow. We may go to a spiritual class, and then suppose we hear that we must learn to accept. Many inner voices will start thinking "*What? Acceptance? That's for losers. That's resignation, what do you mean accept? These people who accept, they have no other choice.*" The reason I am spending so much time on this inner voice is because it is the voice of resistance. Because we are resisting experiences, we don't want things to be the way they are, and that is why we are pushing against the experience.

Let's just imagine you want to have a peaceful experience and you go for the day to Lake District. It is so beautiful - there is lovely meadow, green fields, there is a nip in the air, it's springtime, flowers are blooming everywhere, and you are with someone you love - everything is so perfect! You are in harmony with everything because you don't want the meadows to be more green than they are, you don't want the flowers to stop blooming, you don't want the trees to be different. The way everything is, is exactly how you want it to be, your heart is open and you feel so full of energy and vitality, you feel like you are on top of the world, and can conquer anything. You want to hold on to this experience, when you do not have it, you are craving for it. You are preoccupied by this desire. You want to recreate that experience and this is called, in Sanskrit a raga, which is a craving, a very strong like for a particular experience or a particular person, or a particular condition.

Going back to the Lake District experience, after some time exploring, you go to a restaurant with your partner. You find this attractive waitress comes along, but you are so uncomfortable because of the way in which your partner is staring at this waitress. Now, this open heart that you had starts to close. You want to protect yourself from hurt. You start sulking and even when your partner tells you they were not looking at the waitress, you are annoyed and hurt. You want your partner to behave in a way that is according to your liking and you want him to avoid certain behavior. All he did was look, but maybe you were reading too much into this, but you cannot see that. You might develop what is called a dvesha, which is a Sanskrit word for an aversion to something, a dislike to something. Another example would be an introvert avoiding public places because they prefer to be alone, they have a raga to be alone, a dvesha for public places. Some might say you should do what is comfortable for you, and that is only partly true.

The Vedic tradition, and especially the Bhagavad Gita, which is a very profound dialogue, states how these *ragas* and *dveshas* rule our lives. We think we are in charge, but our *ragas* and *dveshas* are really. We are drawn to what we like, and we avoid what we dislike, which means we are not open to all of life. These *ragas* and *dveshas*, cravings and aversions, can be about everything -

they could be about the kind of people you like, the situations you want in your life, the kind of tea you have, or the type of breakfast cereal you must have, the person that you must be. We have now divided this beautiful life into two categories: *ragas* and *dveshas*, what I like and what I don't like. And naturally, what we like, we cling to and crave for. And what we don't like, we avoid. With this, life has become very selective for me.

Imagine somebody behaves in a way you don't like, causing your heart to close, and you resist the person. The person actually may have a lot of sense. Say the person is your colleague, and there is something you do not like about them - they are very friendly with everyone and you think they are fake. You have to interact with your colleagues, including this colleague whom you do not like, so what do you do? Every time the person is approaching or you are meeting to have tea for a team meeting, you avoid this person, you resist the person. If you have to work on a project with them which requires a lot of discussions, you dread this time and you cannot stand it. Because I push against reality, I am not awake to the reality of the situation, and I am not awake to all of life and I am not open to what life is about. Your colleague from the previous example may have this tendency which is a little annoying to you, but you are not here to dictate terms to anyone, and if you were to say "I accept that I cannot accept this person" that would be a great start, but because I resist, the emotional buildup for me is much more. Because remember, that inner voice which is seeking control, security, and certainty is in overdrive.

It is very important that we understand how we resist life. We will never understand the value of acceptance unless we understand how resistance can play havoc in my life. Much of our fear, our anger, our jealousy, and the many conflicts that we have, are because we are resisting life, and that resistance manifests as a *raga*, a craving for something, or an aversion. These *ragas* and *dveshas* are different from preferences - it is good to have a preference, and it is natural to have a preference. When you are in harmony with the times when that preference is not occurring in the way that you want, then you have made the journey from resistance, to acceptance.

Acceptance is seeing what is.

That is my definition, and it stands also in the Vedic tradition. You see what is, you are awake to the reality of the situation, you are not blind to it, and reality may or may not be comfortable, but you are ok with that. You are in harmony with it, and when I say you are in harmony with reality, what I mean is you are in harmony with the world and its many principles as you experience it.

What do I mean when I say principles? There is nothing random about this creation, there is a certain order. There are physical laws, like the law of gravity which is impartial, i.e. an apple will fall down at the same speed whether I throw it or you throw it. Laws are impartial, and there is a predictability about them. There is an element of cause and effect about them, and in terms of physical laws, there is a lot of intelligence. When you look at your emotions, and you look at the way in which you respond to emotions, to your thoughts, to your various desires, there too, there is a

psychological order and that is the attempt of many psychologists, to study the psychological principles. We see this world to be very intelligent, and, when we are awake to the reality of the situation, we have a working knowledge of the laws and principles that contribute to a given situation.

What do you do about these cravings and aversions, these *ragas* and *dveshas* that you have? Some might say, you should not have them at all. Well, that is the least helpful advice you could receive. It's like telling a person who gets angry, they should try not to get angry. Here is where this very profound dialogue called Bhagavad Gita, which is 700 verses, steps in. What is very beautiful about that dialogue is that it is between the Lord Bhagavan, and the individual. The Lord happens to be Bhagavan Krishna and the individual happens to be Arjuna. Arjuna is an accomplished warrior, and the whole dialogue happens on the battlefield. With the corona virus going around, some say it is like a battlefield we are currently in. On any battlefield, there are things to be done and there are things to be awake to, which we might refer to as acceptance. Arjuna asks his close friend, Bhagavan Krishna, for a permanent solution for the problem of sorrow. Not a temporary solution, but a permanent solution. What Bhagavan Krishna teaches him is not to do these yoga asanas, not to chant the mantras, not to meditate, he does not give him some war strategy - remember, he is the Lord, so he can ensure Arjuna wins the war, but he does none of that. When the problem is of ignorance, then the only solution is knowledge.

A part of this teaching is where Bagvan Krishna reveals the nature of the atma, who that "I" is, who the self is. He also talks about a very beautiful disposition called Karma Yoga which includes an attitude of doing karma.

Karma Yoga has two aspects to it. The first, is called *kaushalam* which means a certain competence, a certain skill in karma which conforms to dharma, a universal set of values and principles. *Kaushalam*, or life competence, in line with dharma, is one aspect of karma yoga. The second, is acceptance, or *samatvam*, more or less having a certain sameness of mind. How does one apply this, or is it even relevant to my life? It is relevant to all of humanity because we are always involved in doing karma. Karma is will based action. If a donkey kicks, it is not karma, but if a human being kicks, then, there are certain consequences. These consequences are both direct, visible, and indirect, invisible.

So, you have these *ragas* and *dveshas*, and you cannot fight it. You definitely want your life to be exactly the way you want. How does this Karma Yoga apply in my life? Let's say you are trying to avoid getting infected with CoronaVirus, there has been a lockdown, but you go to get groceries. After a day, you start coughing, and there is a possibility that you might have the virus. Let's say you go in for a test the next day.

There are four types of results that are possible.

1. One, is you have the virus, but, you are confident that you will home quarantine, and you will be cured in two weeks time. The result is equal to what you expected.

2. The second type of result is less than what you expect. So, the doctors are nasty to you and they actually say you have to stay in the hospital, the condition of the hospital is very bad. So the result is less than what you expect.
3. The third type of result is much more than what you expect. You test positive, but you do a lot of prayers and then, in a couple of days time, all of your symptoms have vanished, you don't know how or why.
4. Or, the fourth result is that the result is different from what you expect. So, although you tested positive, there is a nurse in your apartment complex, and she helps you to home quarantine, and as you are talking to her, she tells you about her son who is a venture capitalist, and he hears about your business plans and he says he will fund you for your new venture. So here, the result is different from what you expect.

In your life, in your different situations, you are constantly interacting with these possible sets of results. Either the result is equal to what you expect, less than what you expect, more than what you expect, or it may be different than what you expect. In the world, there cannot be any other type of permutation and combination.

When the result is equal to, or more than what I expect, that is perfect and we have no problem with acceptance - we are in harmony with it. But, when the result is less than what we expect, then, we resist. We fight it, we don't want to accept it, and we don't understand why things are the way they are. This has been a common experience for many kinds of situations. So now, the Bhagavad Gita tells us, that if you were to have *samatvam*, an acceptance of the situation, then, you would grow enormously in your self mastery.

That's a bit confusing - how can you accept what has happened if what has happened is not acceptable? It is unjust and unfair, why do we have to suffer? This *samatvam*, the sameness of mind, more or less the same, with respect to opposites, comes from my understanding of the laws and principles that are shaping different situations and results. The question is, who is the one that is the author or the one who has made up these laws of nature? God, or we say Bhagavan has shaped these laws, and no law can function in isolation. The law maker is required for a certain law to function. Say you make a law in your house that when everyone walks in, all footwear must be kept by the door. Now there will be people who are in a hurry, so they will just walk in, or they want to go back to the washroom so they do that, your law has gone for a toss. Any law cannot function by itself, it needs someone to make it function and the understanding of Bhagavan, or God in the tradition, is very profound because it includes you.

All the material and all the intelligence in the world that shaped the different laws and principles that one source is God - something to be understood. Thus, when I am interacting with any situation, what I am really getting is a gift. I find that whatever I eat gets digested - the way in which our cells function is such deep intelligence, they know just how much food to retain, which parts are the nutrients, which are carbohydrates and protein, the cells just know that, and they didn't go to university for it. The intelligence that is there in the way in which our cells function, the way we

breathe, the way circulation happens, the way things get assimilated, the way things get evacuated, this intelligence of my body or even of my mind, it's not something created by me, and it is not something created by my parents. The Veda, our sacred scripture, which is a body of knowledge reveals to us that this intelligence is actually God, or Bhagavan, and it is given to you every single moment.

It is very interesting to note that when Newton and Descartes were formulating their theories, it was well understood that God in their understanding, was the one who had authored the laws of nature, but, then they had a problem with the church and they wanted to separate science and religion. God was then removed and they were called laws of nature - it is mechanical and scientific. So, God was taken out of the picture because of Newton's resistance to the church. One can argue that there were enough reasons for his resistance, but, it's important to know historically why things have happened the way they have.

We have been blessed with a lot of power, we use the word shakti for it. So much power and energy has been given to us. Imagine a child wants a red ball, they can hardly crawl, and they want that red ball, so they have this power to desire, what we call *iccha shakti*. It just doesn't stop with that, the child also has the power to crawl towards it, so this is *kriya shakti*, the power to do. And, there is also *jnana shakti*, the power to know. The child knows that the easiest way to get to the red ball is to go straight for it. But, they are very helpless, so they just cry and then somebody comes along and gives them the ball.

What is so beautiful about this is that although I am helpless, I do not feel helpless. I repeat, although I am seemingly helpless, I do not feel helpless. In fact, I have the power to do, I have the power to desire, and I have the power to know. And the beautiful thing about this gift that we have, is that all of us at every given moment of our lives, have this power. Nelson Mandela had it, Gandhiji had it, Churchill had it, all the world leaders, all the saints, all the criminals, have and had these powers. And that power when used in alignment with dharma, can make you so proud and happy about your accomplishments because you are awake to the reality of what you have been given, there is acceptance in your life.

When a lot of us get praised or complimented, we say “no, no, you are just being kind.” But, it's true, a lot of it may be true. There is a resistance to accept even a compliment, we can't accept that we *did* manage to do a lot. The competence in action which is in line with universal values, comes because I have an acceptance of the situation and we find that in this crisis, so many people have stepped up in terms of their generosity of spirit, there is no need to do what they do, but they do it out of the openness and the expansiveness of their heart. They do it because they are not in denial, there is an acceptance of the situation and there is an acceptance of the results. You know that certain things you do may or may not work, because we are not able to predict how a result will work out - as we discussed, there are four types of results. And this craving and aversion I have, when I try to fulfill it by conforming to laws and principles and by conforming to values, then I find that my level

of acceptance grows. That acceptance comes from understanding that Bhagavan is offering me a gift, what we might refer to in India as prasada.

If you have not been to a temple I recommend you go to a temple at least once in your lifetime, and what is very beautiful about that whole experience is really that when the worship (puja) is done, the priest offers you something, and whatever is offered, we extend our hand and accept it with a lot of gladness and cheerfulness because you consider it to be sacred. It has come from the altar and it is sacred. There is no argument, there is no wishing, willing, wanting, nothing - you accept it cheerfully and gratefully, because it comes to you from the altar that is Bhagavan.

Really speaking, every moment that comes to us from the altar of Bhagavan, because it is all shaped by laws and principles and this entire order which is a very dynamic order - the people in my life, the situations in my life, the opportunities in my life, the difficulties in my life, the power that I have, the different *shaktis* I have, all the way, it is a gift. And when there is a gift, I am awake to the gift that I am receiving from a moment to moment basis. Then, acceptance is very natural. It's effortless, because I do not resist, and I do not fight it. Of course, when I talk about not resisting, then if you are in a situation of adharma, if something wrong is being done, or if there is abuse or some such, then acceptance is that you are not going to tolerate this kind of abuse, it's not in line with dharma, and to uphold these universal laws, you will raise your voice. That is the right thing to do - acceptance does not mean you tolerate nonsense.

Acceptance is just seeing what is and the value of acceptance becomes very deep for us when we see what resistance has done to us, and that resistance is fighting life, resistance is closing of the heart, whereas acceptance is opening of the heart and being full of energy, vitality and the willingness to do whatever is required.

Om Tat Sat