

"The Problem is You" "The Solution is You" by Pujya Swamiji

Two Types of Problems

There are two types of problems in life, one is a problem for which the solution lies outside the problem; the other is a problem for which the solution is within the very problem.

The problem of food, clothing, shelter etc. belong to the first category; one has to seek solution outside. Take the problem of hunger. One has to go in for food in order to appease the hunger. Here the Solution, food, lies outside the problem hunger. If you do not have a shelter, you have to get since it is not available with you; it is outside you. Therefore you have to seek the solution in an external situation. There are many problems of this kind in our individual life, in our social life, in our national life. These may be called situational problems and they can be solved by planning and effort, taking into account the resources at our disposal.

Now suppose someone gives you a jigsaw puzzle involving four pieces which when arranged in a particular manner, form the letter S. Each piece has its own shape, angularity etc., and individually none of them makes any meaning; they become meaningful only when arranged in a given manner. But when you try juggling with these pieces, trying different arrangements, they do not form the letter S. When you are not able to solve the puzzle in spite of repeated attempts, when you are not able to see the pieces falling in their place, you may construe that a piece may be missing. You may feel that the solution lies outside the problem, the four pieces, and that, may be a fifth or even a sixth piece is necessary to solve the puzzle. But that is not the case. The four pieces alone are required. This is the second kind of problem where the solution lies within the problem. Solution of this kind of a problem requires an informed or an enlightened person who knows the solution. He has the solution in his head; he can see the letter S within the four pieces even when they are not assembled.

The apta has to tell you that the solution is within the problem and that you have to arrange the pieces in a particular manner to arrive at the solution. It is this second kind of problem – when the solution is within the problem – we shall be talking about.

If the solution is contained in the problem and it is still a “problem”, the problem is purely due to ignorance. The problem is caused by the ignorance of a fact and therefore we have a problem instead of a fact. The knowledge of the fact alone solves such a problem.

The Problem of Human Sadness

The problem of human sadness is a problem that has the solution within itself. Generally we think that the solution of this problem lies outside because we always manage to find a reason for our sadness, external to ourselves. It seems there is a factor other than myself that causes me sadness and that factor has to be corrected, mended, amended or even destroyed to remove my sadness. A reason for sadness is easily sought and found also. Why are you sad? Because I do not have a job; because I am ill; because I am not married yet; because I am married; because I do not have children; because I have one too many because someone has not written; because someone has written ! The ingenuity of the human mind is able to discover the cause for one’s sorrow outside oneself. The conclusion is that sorrow or sadness is a problem for which solution is outside.

Let us examine whether a solution can come from outside.

If your conclusion is that you are sad because you do not have a job, it means that lack of job is the cause for your sadness which should go away totally when you get a job. The job should be able to make you free from sadness. But when you do get a job you find you have a new problem; the place of work is too far away. You

have to spend half your time in travelling; go to the bus-stop, wait for the bus, travel by bus for one hour and again walk to the factory where you work. It would be really nice if you had a house close to the factory. You try for a house and get one right in the colony of the factory workers. But now you discover another problem. The air is totally polluted on account of the smoke from the factory chimney. How can anyone stay in a place like that? The old house was definitely better and you return to the old place. So the problem of transportation is back again ! You solve one problem and another one crops up in its place. The problems of job, transportation, accommodation are situational problems – or they are situation and not problems. But sadness is not something caused by a situation.

If you think a given situation is a source of sadness, you will find it is also a comfort. Mother-in-law is always a source of sorrow but when you want to go to a movie or listen to a Swami, you prefer to leave the child at home and the mother-in-law becomes very handy as a baby-sitter ! So, even mother-in-law is a source of comfort. Any given thing which you look upon as a problem also offers advantages and vice versa. There is nothing in the creation that is one-sided. You examine anything or any situation. If you become a Swami there is an advantage when you are amidst people; people spare you from questions – certain questions at least ! But then you are bothered with other kinds of questions : Swamiji, do you see palms? Can you tell me when I will get married? And so on. The other day, I was taken to a famous zoo in Milwaukee in the United States and I heard a youngster saying to another, "Hey, at this one!" So being a sadhu also has its own advantages and disadvantages. If you get married, there are advantages and some disadvantages too. If you do not get married, there are many advantages but some disadvantages also. Having children gives a sense of fulfilment but bringing them up has its own problems. If you examine any situation, you will find both advantages and disadvantages and so if any situation can cause sadness to you, you can look upon that very situation as a source of comfort too. The one who is comfortable because of situation will also become sad because of situation.

Can Positive Thinking Remove Sadness?

Anything can be looked upon in more than one ways. Looking at a rose, one can say, "The rose is beautiful but it has thorns." Or "in spite of thorns rose is beautiful". Both the views are alright, because they are based on facts. This brings us to the so called 'positive thinking', people talk about these days. It is a way of looking at things. "Rose is beautiful, but it has thorns" – this is the complaining way of looking at a rose. "In spite of thorns, rose is beautiful", is a positive way of looking at it. There are many people who propound this positive thinking as a means of overcoming sadness. But this cannot solve the problem of human sadness for good because where there is a positive thinking; there must be a fact that makes it a factual positive thinking. If this is so, there is going to be another fact forming the basis for negative thinking.

Take the case of this man who had a very poor self-image. He always looked down upon himself. He had concluded that he had not made his life, that he was a failure. People around him also contributed to making this a firm conclusion and so nobody really could help him out of it. He went to a Swami and told him about his state of mind. The Swami told him, "You positively look at yourself. See what all things you have. You have a pair of eyes that sees properly, a pair of ears that hears properly, a nose that smells properly. There are so many people who have no eyes; there are so many who are deaf; there are noses which do not sense smell. You have all the senses intact, a healthy body, and (what should be called) a normal mind. How many people are there who are not privileged to have these? And you have good education, a good parentage. There are so many orphans who do not even know their parents and countless others who have no education at all. And you have a nice family, a job and a house. Really speaking, you are blessed. Why do you have such a low image of yourself? You have so many positive things about yourself." Told thus by the Swami, the man was really convinced. He admitted, "There is really nothing to complain about. I am very happy now; no more sad, Thank you Swamiji". And he walked out.

As the man was even leaving, he saw someone stopping his Mercedes car on the kerb and

coming out. When our man, now equipped with positive thinking, saw this person, he noticed that this man also had a pair of eyes, a pair of ears, a nose, a healthy body and all such things that he had and plus a Mercedes car ! He became sad again ! He realised that the other man had everything that he had and a Mercedes car whereas he did not even have a scooter! The positive thinking evaporated! Positive thinking does not work. It is silly. If positive thinking is based on facts, so is negative thinking. It is a fact that one man had the car whereas the other did not have it. The first one had all the advantages of a car which the second one did not have. Thus as long as there are facts, negative thinking will always exist along with positive thinking and the conclusion, "I am sad" will ever remain with you because you think that sadness is caused by external world. Positive thinking cannot erase the conclusion, "I am sad."

Can change in situation remove sadness?

If external world is the cause for your sadness, you cannot get rid of that sadness even if you create a new situation or go to a new place. Let us say you go to heaven which is supposed to be an ideal situation for everyone.

There are different concepts of heaven. According to our scriptures, there is no hunger or thirst in the heaven, nobody is afflicted with hunger or thirst, old age or death in the heaven. So obviously there is no need for food and so there would be no restaurants in heaven! There would be bhel-puri, no pani puri; in fact, no pri at all! So you cannot get these things there even though you love them. All you have in heaven is dance and music. You will get bored.

According to a religious sect in the West, the faithful will go to heaven and have eternal dinner with God. Now a typical Western dinner starts with soup and so the eternal dinner would also start with soup. But since you must be eternally there on the dinner table, you cannot take even one sip of soup because if the dinner is started, it will end also. So you will have to keep the soup-spoon near your mouth but never even taste the soup! You will not proceed at all. So you are stuck with soup!

In the heaven also, different residents have different status and therefore they experience different degrees of joy because the status can also give you happiness. Our scriptures give a

detailed account of the degree of happiness associated with different status. Imagine a young man who is strong, healthy, and brave and clear thinking. He is well brought up, well educated, leads a life of dharma and so has no conflicts in his mind. He owns the entire earth with all its resources, with no rival to share or to threaten. All these will obviously give him the highest degree of happiness. Multiply this by one hundred and you get unit of happiness enjoyed by Manushya Gandharvas. The happiness enjoyed by Deva Gandharvas is a hundred times that of Manushya Gandharvas and so it goes. You keep multiplying by one hundred each time and you can get an estimate of the degree of happiness enjoyed by the Pitrs, Ajaana Devaas, the Karma Devaas (who serve the Devaas), the Devaas, Indra, Brhaspati, Prajapati and Brahma. The idea is that different status give different degree of joy and so even in the heaven you will feel inadequate due to comparison.

Most of the youngsters entertain ambitions of going abroad. First choice is of course USA. Failing that, Canada. If not that, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Dubai, Bahrain. If none of these, well Malaysia, Singapore, Hongkong.....somewhere. That is the vision, the ambition of most of the youngsters – there are exceptions I am sure. Now listen to this. There is this man from Kerala, who is in Kuwait and who has made it. Once when I was in Kuwait, he says, "Swamiji, how if we go out for a spiritual picnic, a satsanga?" But where can we go? You drive for one hour in any direction and you reach the boundary. Where can we go? "Swamiji, we shall go to a place five miles from here." "What is there?" "Swamiji, there is a tree there. We can all sit under the tree and have outdoor satsanga for a change". Imagine a person coming from Kerala which is one of the most green state, running around for miles in search of one tree! What an ananda, joy there? You can make some money there but you cannot get everything.

Therefore, wherever you go, whatever changes you bring about, the situational happiness will always be relative. Every situation has two sides where one side is fine but the other one is not. In fact, all the situations, the whole life is like the Gujarati pickle which is sweet and hot simultaneously! Every situation, like a coin, has two sides. If you have one side, you have the other. This being the case, there is no way of solving the problem of sadness by any situational change.