

## Interview with Pujya Swamiji

### What is crucial in dealing with loss is not to lose the lesson

Chennai: Pain, crises, problems and clashes. These seem to be increasingly enmeshed in our lives. We are permanently in 'the emergency ward,' bemoans **Swami Dayananda Saraswati**, founder of Arsha Vidya Gurukulam, Coimbatore ([www.arshavidya.in](http://www.arshavidya.in)). To get out of the 'ward,' to resolve and avoid conflict in our world, the work that needs to be done is just to honestly try to understand one another, he prescribes. "And nowhere is the necessity for this understanding more critical than in the area of religion," the Swamiji adds, during the course of a recent email interaction with *Business Line*.

Of particular importance now is the need to work to resolve and avoid conflict, he insists. "Strife is costly—it drains all our resources, not just currency; it tears the fabric of our society; it fractures the innate ethical infrastructure of tender young minds and seasoned old ones; it breaks us, psychologically, with grief and rage; it impoverishes us spiritually, as we find our minds crowded with noxious concerns and with no leisure to pursue the cherished promise of a human life, the consideration of the profound questions that will not go away."

Excerpts from the interview, in which Swami Dayananda reflects on what caused the current economic crisis, how to cope with it, and also which areas to focus on, going forward.

**Greed is behind the unfolding financial meltdown across countries, analysts say. Do you agree with that view? Or, is there more to the malaise that is now hitting economies like a tsunami? More importantly, what do our scriptures say about such situations of whole societies going down the spiral of degrowth, unemployment and recession?**

The greed to make money out of money without producing anything industrial, agricultural or electronic is the cause for the American financial meltdown. And also the lower middle class and the middle class are not able to pay their bills due to unemployment caused by greed for more profit on the part of industrialists and traders which drove them to go out of the country for getting their jobs done. The loan service to the banks for mortgaged homes was not kept up — now the banks have houses which they cannot sell as the same banks have to bankroll the buyers!

In our country, our infrastructure like roads, power, corruption-free smooth governance is left with a lot to be desired for us to think of getting any share in the competitive international market. The impractical labour unions also do not help in the reduction of cost of production. In other words, where there is no commitment to *dharma*, there is going to be this kind of fall. It will be still worse if you do not go back to our dharma of individual contributions that go under the name of duty in different areas of our day-to-day life.

**All of a sudden, we find very educated and smart people having a tough time coping with the effects of the credit crunch. What guidance would be the most appropriate to those who are hit by the crisis, and to those on the fringes?**

This underscores the fact that to be educated and smart is not the same as being intelligent. To be intelligent is to be intimately alive to certain realities.

In life, loss is inevitable. Everyone knows this, yet in the core of most people it remains deeply denied—'This should not happen to me.' It is for this reason that loss is the most difficult challenge one has to face as a human being.

So the first step in coping with loss is to accept that it has happened. How? We have to start with the facts. If the fact is that I cannot accept it, I first accept that I cannot accept it. This is where prayer will help; eventually, being kind to oneself and being prayerful, one will be able to accept the fact.

Grief will follow, naturally, since one is human. Being human is a matter for celebration, so we need to respect that grief, even, I would say, welcome it. It is as much a part of the natural order of things as loss. This acceptance of loss and the attendant grief involves so many things, but one of the most important things is not to waste energy blaming, either oneself or others, even when there are perceived injustices.

Here, our understanding of *karma* is a great blessing to us, and we can press it into service to help us move on. Then we are free to focus our energies on finding solutions to this new problem.

And above all, we are free to ask, "What do I learn from this situation?" What is crucial in dealing with loss, is not to lose the

lesson. That makes you a winner in the most profound sense.

None of this is easy; there can be a certain helplessness at any stage, right from accepting the loss. But here we can help ourselves a lot with prayer. Prayer in any form is efficacious, because it is an action. It will, therefore, have a result. That is the law of this universe in which we find ourselves.

**Going forward, are there things that societies and economies have to now focus on, to avert such economic calamities of epidemic proportions?**

What is required now is a reorganising of priorities according to what has deeper and more lasting value.

The one thing that can protect a society or an individual against calamity of any kind is dharma. This is the assurance of our sastra, 'Dharma that is protected, protects; *dharmo raksati raksitah*'. This is especially germane right now as the most pressing thing in our time is to root out corruption. People don't understand the significance of this. It is hemorrhaging our resources at so many levels.

Another important thing is to assume responsibility, as individuals, as nations, and as global citizens for those who need care—our children, our sick, our elderly our poor. This is not altruism or philanthropy, much less socialism; it is a duty, a human duty. Because a human being is endowed with empathy, he violates the natural order if he does not reach out to those who need care.

Responding to this empathy, one is in harmony with the order of things, with dharma, otherwise, one is not. And that has consequences. Look at the quality of life in nations who have not abdicated this

responsibility. Look at those who have. The more one understands this, the more one is insulated against calamity.

In order to help people understand, to help people grow to be ethically responsible, and to enjoy a more elevated quality of life in which they are not consumed by the need to 'have' and even to 'grab', there needs to be a resurgence of culture.

Through the fine and performing arts, the output of the finest minds of a civilisation, one can tap and develop the finer, deeper elements of oneself. This is a blessing to oneself, to one's community, local and global, and to the very planet we share.

**You said that nowhere is the necessity for human understanding more critical than in the area of religion...**

True. This is not the task of the neighbour, the co-worker, the fellow student, the vast majority who have no problem living together harmoniously in all their blessed

diversity. This is the specific task of the source of the problem, the religious leaders.

They need to commit themselves to finding ways to come to a position of genuine mutual respect. Tolerance won't help; the problems will continue to simmer, as we have seen. The basis of intolerance has to be aired, analysed, discussed threadbare and uprooted in a spirit of a genuine quest for mutual respect and understanding.

As daunting as it seems, this is possible if religious leaders can refocus on the unique strength that they all have in common, the thing that made them religious rather than financial, military or political leaders.

The religious leaders can achieve mutual respect if their efforts are born of their shared commitment to what is sacred. As religious persons, not even leaders, they have an imperative to do this, as there is no achievement in our time that will have a greater impact on world peace.

[InterviewsInsights.blogspot.com](http://InterviewsInsights.blogspot.com)

## Arsha Vidya Newsletter

### Announcement

As you are aware, we are in for a change in the circulation format of the Newsletter. Now it will be available online — from January 2009, free of charge. A limited number of copies will be printed to cater to those who have already sent their subscription. The printed version will be discontinued after March 2009.

The web copy of Arsha Vidya News can now reach a much wider audience. You can share your e-copy with more people. You can give a print out to those who do not have the facility to access e-copy.

To start getting the Newsletter just subscribe at our website: [www.arshavidya.in](http://www.arshavidya.in). If you do not have an email address, please send the email address of someone close to you who can help you see the newsletter.