

The Book of Enlightening Laughters Swami Dayananda Saraswati

Collection of Stories & Anecdotes From the Talks of

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SO WHAT?

There are always pleasant and unpleasant situations in life. Human life is always fraught with situations which are both pleasant and unpleasant. But people want things always to be pleasant. Most of our responses to situations are reactions because there is no acceptance of facts. The following response, attributed to a great Stoic philosopher upon hearing tragic news, shows reduction of facts to facts.

The philosopher who was waiting for the news of the safe arrival of a large sailing ship carrying aboard his wife and children and all his wealth, answered a knock upon his door and found a breathless messenger who announced:

"Sir, the ship carrying your wife and money has sunk!"

"What?"

"The ship has sunk!"

"So what?"

"Sir, you have lost all your wealth."

"What?"

"Your fortune is gone."

"So what?"

“Sir, nothing was salvaged; you are penniless!”

“What?”

“You are a pauper!”

“So what?”

“Sir, no one survived. You have lost your wife and children.”

“What?”

“You are a childless widower.”

“So what?”

Look at these two types of responses from the same person. The first response is an excited “What?” The second is a cool “So what?” The difference is obvious. When he said “What?” it is not that he had not understood what he was told and that he was asking for a clarification. The messenger had announced the news in clear words and it was very clear to him that the ship had sunk, and still when he said, “What?” it meant, “Oh, no! Not really!” Thus, “What?” is the response of the non-acceptance of a fact. There is a great distance between these two types of response. This philosopher took only a few seconds to bridge this distance.

An ordinary person will keep building upon that non-acceptance. There is a sense of loss and one sees oneself as a person without the family and all that money brings. One would have to start all over again and there is no certainty of success. One sees a variety of things associated with the absence of family, with the absence of money, and becomes sadder and sadder. It is all due to the resistance to accept the fact that the ship has sunk.

The philosopher also said, "What?" as an ordinary person would say it. "What?" is the response from a person who has not accepted the fact, who does not want to accept the fact. But he was a thinking person, a mature person and therefore the next response was, "So what?" That is the response from a person who has accepted the fact.

"The ship is sunk, so what? There is nothing I can do about it. If something can go wrong, it will go wrong - that is Murphy's law. If a ship can sink, it will sink. I am a pauper. Well, so what? I am penniless. I made money, lost it. Now I shall work to make it again. My wife and children are gone. Grief and despair won't bring them back. They are gone. So what? That is a fact. I am here. That is a fact. I assimilate the facts and do what is required of me under the circumstances."

The factual response is the approach to situations of a truly practical person. One is most practical when one sees situations objectively. This is real human strength. Human strength is not found in powerful miracles but in the quiet mind of the one who faces situations as they are. Such a one is a strong person. Human weakness is the inability to accept situations, to face facts. Human strength is the strength of reducing situations to simple facts.

Om Tat Sat

"Find you will yourself; The self hitherto unknown but sought after, The self that is strangely missed and searched for, The self that you love to be, That you are."

- Swami Dayananda Saraswati