

ADVERSITY abounds in human life. Prosperity, by comparison, is of short duration and comes only rarely. Therefore, it is very important to understand and appreciate the Divine spiritual value of adversity.

Insight into the law of karma allows you to understand that every situation you face today is a result of actions performed in the past, whether that implies the days that have already passed by in this life or the events of previous incarnations. If a past negative karma has put you in an adverse situation, by your present self-effort you can turn that situation into something meaningful and significant. In fact, you can turn that adversity into prosperity.

Suppose, for example, that due to past negative karma you have been placed in the situation of having to work very hard for your material subsistence or, perhaps, to put forth tremendous effort in order to exist in harmony with others. However, suppose that through philosophical insight, patience, and prayer you are able to invoke the Divine Presence within you for developing strength and courage. Then, adversity becomes prosperity because it has helped to awaken your willpower and brought you closer to God.

On the other hand, suppose that as a result of the good karma of the past you are in a prosperous situation, but are unable to handle your prosperity in a mature way. You have become an extremely successful businessman, who, with only the slightest effort, finds that money seems to pour down from the roof top! However, you have become vain and have lost

your humility, snubbing the very people who were your friends when you were poor. You now want to move only in “high society.” In this situation, then, prosperity has become adversity; it has deprived you of the simplicity of your heart, and is preparing the foundation for great miseries to come.

Thus, from a philosophical point of view, adversity that brings you closer to God is far better than prosperity that takes you away from God. This does not mean, however, that you should promote adversity, because every adversity does not bring you closer to God. It is only when you have philosophically trained your mind that you can perceive the benefits that can be derived from adverse situations.

For all practical purposes, you should never invite adversity. Rather, learn to prevent it, for it is innate in every human being to fight against pain and sorrow. You need not invoke pain in order to prove your strength, for in the Divine Plan there are lots of stories written and plots already created for you. So strive to promote happiness and prosperity. When, in spite of your best efforts, adversity does come, try to develop the proper understanding to convert it into spiritual austerity.

In order for one to grow, it is necessary to experience adversity. To some people it does not come with great intensity, just a little here, a little there. To those with greater spiritual sensitivity, adversity often comes with greater intensity.

If you are accustomed to living in a house that is filthy, you are satisfied with removing just a

The Divine Value of Adversity

By Swami Jyotirmayananda



little cobweb here and there, dusting a little, and sweeping a little more dirt under the rug, although the house really needs a drastic cleaning. However, when you become accustomed to a higher degree of cleanliness, you are eager to remove all the cobwebs, scrub the rug completely, open all the windows and allow the house to be thoroughly cleaned. In other words, you are happy to give the house a good thrashing.

Much in the same way, your personality is like a house. By the Divine Plan, when there is a favorable movement, God's Hand is there to help you free yourself of impurities. He subjects your whole personality to a great commotion and turmoil. Therefore, do not consider adversity out of place. With insight into the Divine Plan, adversity becomes austerity for you and serves as a basis for generating good karmas.

Thus, adversity can become an eye-opener, and prosperity may blind you and become a basis for sorrow. Misused prosperity is actually adversity in disguise.

T rue prosperity is that which allows the good qualities of your heart to flourish. There is a Sanskrit saying, "*Namanti phalino vrikhsah*," which means, "When a tree bears lots of fruit, its branches bow down in humility."

The implication is that if you are truly prosperous, you become humble. If humility does not come, then you are not prosperous. Thus, prosperity should not make you vain nor tarnish the purity of your intellect.

Similarly, adversity should not lead you into a state of sustained sorrow and dejection. It should be viewed with the insight that there is a Divine purpose behind it: a supremely compassionate God is challenging your soul to discover its strength. The intention behind creation is not to afflict any soul with constant suffering. Suffering is given only for the soul's evolution and advancement.

When a growing child wants to eat everything in sight, even mud, the mother will snatch the unhealthy things out of the child's hand. To be robbed of what he wants is a painful experience, but the mother must do what is best for the healthy growth

and development of her child. Much in the same manner, the painful conditions to which the soul is subjected have been designed in the Divine plan for the healthy evolution of the soul.

Rising Above Prosperity and Adversity

Prosperity can lead your mind to develop attachment, or *raga*, and adversity can lead you to develop hatred, or *dwesha*. Don't allow your mind to develop either of these debilitating sentiments. Rather, develop the spiritual art of rising above the world. When you are encountering adversity, develop the spirit of surrender. Do not waste your time and energy looking for someone to blame, nor nurture a spirit of revenge. Thinking to yourself, "He should only fall into a ditch and end up in the hospital with a broken leg!" may satisfy you for a while, but it serves no healthy purpose at all.

Rather, learn to understand that the Hand that moved through the person who hurt you is God's, and He is the cleverest of all. All situations, positive and negative, come from the same Divine source. It is an illusion to believe that adversity is brought about by people. According to your own karmic process, God has arranged everything in such a way that you interact with whomever is necessary—even thieves, if need be.

This does not mean that the moment you see a thief or a mugger you should bow down and start worshipping God in him. In your practical life you should do what is practical. However, in your inner heart you must turn to God and ask Him, "Why have you put me in this trouble? Show me the purpose behind this suffering, and give me the strength to remove the weakness so that I may correct my situation."

If you learn the art of turning to God through meditation, prayer, and *satsanga* (good association), you will convert your adversity into austerity, and ultimately into prosperity. Then you will realize that your life is a constant festivity and adversity is merely an illusion.