

HOW TO SOLVE PROBLEMS

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SINCE HUMAN LIFE abounds with problems, a deep philosophical insight into problems is important. When a problem develops, mind becomes confused; and when confused, it cannot find a solution. Further, many problems are solved only in a superficial manner, and when one problem is seemingly resolved, another appears. Therefore, if you were able to understand the psychological basis within yourself that causes problems, you would gain a deeper insight into how to solve them.

According to Yoga philosophy, the human mind comes under the influence of three modes of nature, or *gunas*: *sattwa*, *rajas*, and *tamas*. When there is *sattwa*, there is mental harmony. When there is *rajas*, there is distraction or restlessness in the mind. When there is *tamas*, there is inertia, laziness, mental dullness. When your mind is peaceful and filled with *sattwa*, even the most confusing problem becomes simple. But when your mind is restless and dominated by *rajas*, even an ordinary situation becomes a great problem. The mind is always influenced by these three *gunas*. Therefore, they must be well understood.

When upset or distracted, you become like a magnet, drawing problems. I will explain this with the help of a parable. Once a man went into a shop and asked for some honey. But before buying, he wanted to taste it. Being a little sloppy, he dropped a bit on the floor. Soon there was a swarm of bees after the little drop. Nearby, a lizard began to move after the bees. The pet cat of the shopkeeper saw the lizard and immediately pounced upon it. In so doing, he attracted the attention of the customer's dog. The dog began chasing the cat, and being excited, injured it considerably.

This brought about a terrible fight between the customer and the shopkeeper. The shopkeeper then got his relatives and friends and the customer also recruited all his relatives and friends. Then there was a terrible fight. Many people were hurt and much property lost... all over a little drop of honey!

The mystical implication of this parable helps us understand how problems arise. When, like the spilling of a little drop of honey, a little disorder occurs within yourself, there arises *rajas* or restlessness in your mind. Then a swarm of thoughts, known as *vrittis* in Raja Yoga, go after that little drop in order to organize the mind. The senses, like lizards, then go after the ripples of the mind. The mind goes after the senses like a cat; ego goes after the mind like a dog, and soon you are involved in a great inner battle. So if you analyze problems, you realize that very small causes become exaggerated. When you promote

serenity within yourself, you discover that what you considered a baffling situation was really simple. A great problem reduces itself into insignificance and you resolve it. You go beyond it.

Behind all problems is the law of karma. The karmic process within the individual and the law of karma are rooted in the mental process. Therefore, some simple points about the mind and its control need to be understood so that you are better prepared to face baffling situations in life.

Promote Sattwa

Of prime importance is the promotion of *sattwa* (harmony). This is not a simple process, but rather an art you unfold by adopting an advanced philosophy of life. Live your day-to-day life so that your mind draws to itself positive impressions instead of negative ones.

Of the many techniques given in the scriptures, the most important in promoting *sattwa* is *satsanga*, coming into association with a religious, spiritual or philosophical group to listen to teachings about the great themes of life. When you listen to the glory of the Divine Self and gain insight into your life and personality, your mind swims into a different environment and becomes elevated, leaving behind all its cares and anxieties.

The next method of promoting *sattwa* is the study of elevating scriptures. Learn to be thoughtful by studying the Upanishads, the Gita, the Bible and the great

works of wisdom presented by Sages and Saints all over the world. Another important method is selfless service—allowing your energy to be channelized through service to humanity. This allows your heart to be purified.

All these methods enable your mind to be lifted and *satwic*. Therefore, it is not inclined to waste its energy through anger, hatred and greed. When your intellect is in such a healthy state, you develop insight into every situation. Each situation is then viewed as part of an overall Divine plan, a scheme for your evolution. You no longer look at things from an egoistic point of view, saying, "Now I am lost. There is no way I can get out of this. Even God does not know how to resolve it." Rather, you understand that God within you knows that your deeper essence transcends all, and there is always a solution to any problem at any time. This insight develops when you have pure and *satwic* intellect.

Be Positive

Along with promoting *sattwa*, develop the habit of being positive. If you are not watchful, your mind develops deep channels or grooves of negativity, irritability and anger. Once this habitual negativity is established, then no matter what happens, you will always react impatiently.

This point is illustrated by an interesting incident of a rich man who gave a party. Many people came and his servants prepared the food elegantly, except that they did not use enough salt. The host was very angry, but he could not yell at

the servants while his guests were there. When they left, he showered his anger on his servants. A few days later he gave another party. This time the servants were extraordinarily cautious and prepared the food perfectly. All were pleased and praised the cooks. The master came to them later, however, shouting with immense anger. Puzzled, the servants wondered, "How is it that all these people praised our work and you are still angry?" He replied, "I am angry because you did not do that before. If you knew how to do it so well, why didn't you do it the first time?"

The fact is, when you want to be upset, you can be so at any time, for any reason. And if there is no reason, you will find or invent one. If the mind has developed that negative tendency, you will justify yourself for being angry and hateful. On the other hand, if you train your mind well, even in the most provocative situations, even when you are insulted, your mind will not be disturbed. You will remain serene and positive. You will begin to see the Divine hand of God testing you through those circumstances. You

will feel that God is putting you into a tight spot to see whether you can control your mind. This positive form of thinking must be diligently developed.

Towards this project, repetition of mantra is of great importance. Mantra is a mystic syllable or group of words. "Om," according to the Upanishads, is the root mantra. It is one of the shortest mantras and a symbol of the Divine Self.

You can, however, repeat any mantra or Divine name according to your concepts and faith. Choose a name that is most inspiring to your mind and learn the art of repeating it again and again. As you repeat it, try to assert the Divine Presence within yourself. Feel you are coming closer and closer to God, that you are sustained by God.

Even if you are not so thoughtful and are repeating mantra mechanically, still it creates spiritual vibrations and gradually elevates your unconscious in a mysterious manner. Repetition of mantra is the simplest of practices, and day by day creates an internal spiritual strength that enables you to view your problem from a different angle and to transcend it.

Gain an Aerial View

The next important point to be kept before your mind is that a problem is vexing and confounding only when you are unable to go beyond it through spiritual awakening. If you have an aerial view of a problem, you will find many solutions. But without an aerial view, you will just be caught in the problem and feel there is no way out. You will feel that you are doomed and will see everything as a grim finality. But the moment you know how to confront a difficulty without becoming too involved or confused by it, you soar beyond it on the wings of mental serenity, meditation, and Divine feeling. You view problems with an immediate intuitive insight into how to deal with them.

Vedanta offers a way to an aerial view of life's problems. It suggests you look at those problems and solutions of your waking world (which you firmly believe to be real) with the same sense of detachment and amusement you view your dream problems and solutions (which you clearly know to be illusory when you are awake).

In your dream you may find yourself being chased by a snake. That is the problem. Now you ask yourself, "How am I to solve this problem?" Your intellect offers the answer, "Find a stick, crash it on the snake and kill it. If the snake cannot be killed, run away from it."

Now stop for a moment to look at this dream problem and dream solution. Is either of any real substance? When awake, you know that problems in dream are



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not real; they are created out of your own dreaming imagination. You yourself have become the snake as well as the dream subject being chased by the snake. It is all a sport. The moment you realize you are dreaming, even though the dream may be painful and miserable, your pain diminishes. The problem is no longer real.

And what about your dream solution in the above example? Is it a real solution? Of course not! Firstly, even if you kill the snake or run away from it, your dream imagination is so fluid and full of inventiveness that there may be another snake lurking around the corner waiting for you to run into him, and the problem would start all over again.

And secondly, solutions in dream keep you in the realm of dream and are all illusory themselves. Your consciousness can weave endless problems and endless illusory solutions. The only real solution is to wake up and get out of the realm of dream all together. If you are in dream, no matter what type of dream, no matter what type of snake, instead of trying to find a stick or a place to run, try to wake up. That is the transcendental approach.

Vedanta says that you must learn to look at your life in the same way you have looked at this dream example. Identified with a limited, egoistic personality, you feel you have many problems and search for happiness and release in various ways. You seek happiness through wealth, and having acquired wealth, you find it does not solve your problems. Then you run after something else:

power and fame. But having acquired these, you realize they did not solve your problems either. So by resolving a problem, it is only an apparent solution. One problem is replaced by another. And as long as ignorance (*avidya*) continues to dominate the mind, this cycle continues.

Instead of being caught up with your little problems in life, why not focus your attention on the root problem? Somehow you have slipped away from your inner essential nature that is universal. Deep within you is the Universal Self; but due to ignorance, you are dreaming that you are the little ego self. Identified with the ego, you feel, “I am this body. I depend upon so many things. I am subject to birth and death.” All these feelings are based upon the wrong notion that you are a limited individual personality.

On the other hand, by training and purifying your mind, you begin to loosen the grip of ignorance, and you begin to understand that the “I am” in you is eternal. The ego-personality is a transient wave in the ocean of eternal life. You are not the

wave, you are the ocean. From the point of view of the wave, there are problems; but from the point of view of the ocean, there are no problems. Nothing is lost, nothing is gained. Deep within, you are like the Ocean—you are the Eternal Self. As this insight develops, you acquire an aerial view of your problems, and you are no longer confined.

You feel a sense of sport when you know you are dreaming, and the pain of the dream problem vanishes. In the same manner, when you develop an insight into your deeper Self—the insight that “I am not the body”—then there is a sense of sport in life. The world does not spite you. Problems do not overwhelm your mind; you are innately free of them. This is the advanced approach for removing problems: strike at the root problem of ignorance, and rip it out forever by Enlightenment.

Surrender to God

On the spiritual path to Enlightenment, the most important technique to resolve problems is surrender to God, known as *sha-*

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ranagati, or sweet surrender. Try to develop an insight that life is sustained by a Cosmic Plan and that the Divine Hand sustains your personality at all times. Trust in that Divine Hand. You learn to trust so many things. You can be in a barber's chair and trust his blade shining at your throat. You can be in a plane and trust the pilot. You trust so many things day by day; why shouldn't you develop trust in the Divine Hand that has fashioned the body? Even before you came to a normal state of consciousness, that Divine Hand sustained your infant body and provided all the necessities as you were growing. The Divine Plan continues to sustain you even when you are in deep sleep and have no control over your body.

Again and again you should try to remember and develop trust in that Plan. By doing so you develop a relaxed personality. You begin to understand that things cannot happen haphazardly; everything has a purpose. There is no need to become abruptly afraid of any situation. A calamity is never so tragic as imagination renders it. People rehearse calamities, and in rehearsal make them worse than they really are. People are great actors. Things happen in a simple manner. Even death happens simply; but the thought of it terrifies a person and chases him year after year. Therefore, trusting in God is an important mystic art.

The great King Parikshit was foretold that he was going to die within seven days. But in order to avert death, he created a great palace within a fort surrounded by water. He

provided every kind of security for himself, surrounding himself with physicians, doctors, as well as Sages and Saints. No one could enter this palace without being checked by so many people. Six days passed, and the seventh day was coming close to sunset. At that time, a group of young men came to offer flowers before the king as an act of reverence. The king, looking at those flowers, said proudly that now the curse had passed. What was foretold had become false. Seven days had passed and he no longer had any fear.

As he was speaking, he picked up a flower, and within it he saw a little worm. Jokingly he picked the little worm up and put it on his neck saying, "Well little worm, if you want to render the Saint's words true, bite me!" That little worm then became a big snake and bit him. The king died. The message in this episode is that the Divine Plan cannot be altered, so why run from it? Rather, learn to accept the inevitable with a bold heart.

During the Mahabharata War, people were being killed by celestial weapons that were like atomic bombs of ancient times. No one could survive. Yet, it so happened that a big bell from the neck of an elephant dropped on some newly hatched and very tender infant birds. Six or seven of them had been covered by the big bell as the battle raged. After the war, those young ones were found in the midst of streams of blood, corpses and great devastation. They were chirping away with the greatest of joy, as if noth-

ing had happened. The message behind this story is that if it is the Divine Plan, then even in the midst of great catastrophe and turmoil, nothing will happen to you.

Develop trust in the Divine Plan. What is inevitable is good, so let it happen. In the Divine Plan, nothing can go wrong. Therefore, there is no need to become agitated, no need to keep your mind in a state of tension. If you were to learn the art of keeping the mind free of tension by developing that trust, your mind would draw impressions of harmony. Those impressions imply increasing *sattwa* and enable you to solve problems in an effective manner.

In Chapter 9, verse 22 of the Gita, Lord Krishna makes a great statement: "Those who worship Me alone, thinking of nothing else, who are ceaselessly devoted to Me, I look after their *yoga* and *kshema*." The human mind is always worried about two things: how to get things you don't have (*yoga*), and how to protect things you already have (*kshema*). Mental energy is wasted day by day in these two directions.

If you develop trust in God, however, then you work for the things you need, but not with tension and wasted mental energy. Still they come in a mysterious manner. This is not an excuse for inertia or giving up activity. Rather, perform your self-effort in the best possible manner, but, having done your best, keep your mind relaxed. Do not constantly create mental fumes of agitation and grief. Then you will realize that God is mysteriously presenting you with the things you

need. Similarly, try to protect the things you have to the best of your capacity, but not with worry, for they too are protected in a mysterious manner.

Only a relaxed mind can be directed towards the great goal of Self-realization. If mind is not relaxed, all its energy is wasted over worthless things, transient things. You work for so many years to acquire an object, and by the time you acquire it, you realize it is like camphor — no matter what you do, it will just evaporate. Therefore, develop profound trust in God with the conviction that the Divine Hand will look after all your needs.

Another interesting story is told about a poor *brahmin* who was reading the Gita in Kashmir. When he came across that 22nd verse, he took out a red pen and crossed it out, thinking to himself, “There is an error in this Divine statement. Although I have surrendered to God, God has not provided me with all the things I need.” Nevertheless, he kept his mind busy with studying, good association, and repeating mantras.

During that time the *brahmin*’s daughter was to be married. The date was set and the whole party of the bridegroom was to come. However, because of poverty the *brahmin* didn’t have anything to give the groom’s family, nor did he have provisions for the celebration. Not knowing what to do, he tried to forget about the problem by keeping himself immersed in *satsanga*.

One day while the *brahmin* was away, an unusual and beautiful young boy came to the *brahmin*’s house with a cartload of festive ma-

terials, including food, sweets of various types, ornaments and many other things needed to welcome the wedding guests. The young boy told the *brahmin*’s wife that her husband had sent him with all this for the festivity, and he asked her forgiveness for his delay. When the woman looked at this boy more carefully, she noticed the red marks of a whip on his back. “Who could have done this to you? Who could be so cruel?” The boy said, “Your husband whipped me.” She didn’t know what to say. “It is impossible that my husband could be so cruel.” The boy gave her all the materials, took the cart, and went away.

When the *brahmin* returned home, his wife first expressed her joy in having received all the things he had sent. The *brahmin* was puzzled, since he had not sent anything. Then she added, “Imagine you being so cruel, whipping the boy for being a little late!” Though still puzzled, after thinking it over, he realized a Divine miracle had occurred: It was Krishna in the form of the boy, and his mistake of striking out the message in the Gita was like a whipping to Krishna.

It is an interesting story with the message that miracles do happen in life. If you trust the Divine Hand that sustains you, your real needs will be taken care of. Miracles are happening all around you, internally and externally. If you understand that, you will be overwhelmed by how many miracles God engineers at every moment. How do the tender tissues of the brain survive amidst this abrupt world? You are moved around and thrashed

by all types of things; and yet as long as there is karma, you go on surviving. That is a miracle. You eat food and food is converted into flesh and blood. That is a miracle. A tender leaf grows out of the earth. That is a miracle. Miracles are always happening.

Jesus said, “Behold the lilies of the field; how do they grow? They spin not, they toil not, and yet I say unto thee, Solomon in all his wisdom was not arrayed like one of these.” The simple way miracles operate is overwhelming to a sensitive mind. When you begin to see this, there develops trust in that Divine Plan that sustains your life.

So surrender to God, trust in God. Repeat Divine mantras. Try to develop a sense of transcending your problems. Develop a positive mind and be in good association. All these are methods of solving a problem. As you learn these methods, you develop an insight into the root problem—ignorance. That ignorance is removed by Enlightenment or Self-realization.

As you continue to solve your problems with spiritual insight, you develop profound trust in the Hand of God and enjoy the sweetness of Divine Surrender. You discover the Divine Love that melts your heart, allowing your individual consciousness to dissolve in Universal Consciousness. Through Enlightenment, you discover, “I am not the body.” Then you become free of birth and death, and the problems of the world mean nothing at all. Clouds come and go, but the sky is always the same—unaffected.