



The Mystic Art of Handling Adversity

By Swami Jyotirmayananda

One thing that affects every person in this world is adversity. It is often believed that challenges and hardships are inevitable for everyone. While this notion is metaphorical, it underscores the reality that adversity is a common experience in life. However, those who are spiritually ignorant handle their adversity with sorrow and despair. The wise handle it with a serene and composed mind.

Speaking figuratively, why must you and everyone be subjected to adversity? Because you found it comfortable to dwell within the confines of flesh and bones. Therefore, you must experience the consequences!

With a life full of diverse challenges and setbacks, adversity takes on many forms: busi-

ness failures, unmet expectations, disharmony, and health issues. Each obstacle presents its own unique struggle. Despite your best efforts you quite often don't accomplish what you wish to do; you find yourself feeling consistently thwarted. It is a shared experience that everyone encounters to varying degrees at different points in their lives.

Yet despite all this, the wise continue to smile. "How can they do so?" you may ask. What makes a Sage able to inwardly transcend adversity? There is a parable that provides profound insight into this important question:

Once there lived a farmer who led a comfortable household life with his wife and children. Having worked hard, he had become

quite successful in his farming and took pride in his prosperity. Although it was the rainy season and the atmosphere outside was tumultuous with torrential rains, deafening thunder, and electrifying lightning bolts, it was cozy by the fire and the family spent many happy hours there.

One evening during a particularly intense storm, the farmer looking through his window watched the lightning bolts. He marveled at the magnificent display of nature and enthralled he shouted. “How wonderful!”

As he joyfully gazed through the window at the landscape illumined by the flashes of lightning, the farmer noticed the form of a monk seated under a tree. The monk was barely clothed and brutally exposed to the elements. The tree he was seated under hardly afforded him adequate protection from the pouring rain.

The farmer, being proud of his prosperity mocked the monk and jubilantly began singing, “Oh rain, pour down abundantly. Oh clouds, gather together and let your water flow. I have accomplished my task. I have triumphed in my farming endeavors. My home is now brimming with an abundance of food and grains for the upcoming season. Hence, I proclaim, ‘Oh rain, shower upon us’.”

But the monk was not an ordinary person. He was none other than Buddha, the Enlightened One. As he heard the farmer’s joyous cries, he enthusiastically joined in, echoing, “Oh rain, descend more abundantly. May the skies gather more clouds, with thunder and lightning. I too have accomplished my farming. I have sown the seeds of good samskaras and good karmas in the field of my mind. The seeds of meditation and insight have now sprouted, resulting in a bountiful harvest of wisdom. Dwelling in timeless eternity, I remain untouched by external influences. Therefore, pour down, oh rain!”

According to the story, the farmer suddenly realized how ridiculous he was boasting about

perishable wealth. In a moment of clarity, he relinquished his pride, came out of his house, fell at the feet of Buddha, and offered him shelter.

The story is symbolic of how there is a perpetual presence of adversity in life. The story portrays how individuals react to the dark clouds of adversity. But, despite these clouds, it highlights the possibility of attaining inner peace and perfect stability by having a philosophical insight into adversity.

It is important to understand that adversity and prosperity are mere concepts. Sometimes, owing to a lack of insight, one misinterprets a situation. If you have the proper insight, you realize that most of the time what looks like adversity is really prosperity in disguise; and likewise, your prosperities can be adversities in disguise.

When you are elated because of success, you set the stage for misery by building up vanity, “How great am I!” That vanity sprouts seeds of adversity because of inner egoism; so in this instance, prosperity sours into adversity because of your egoistic attitude and will create experiences of sorrow. However, if you remember God and turn your heart towards Him with humility during prosperity, then your mind will maintain balanced and grateful, and your prosperity will remain.

If you turn your heart towards God during what you view as adversity, you will discover deeper qualities that lie hidden, and soon those qualities will unfold. As adversity fades, you will emerge like a radiant moon from behind dark clouds, stronger and brighter than ever before.

Adversity serves as a true test of one’s mental fortitude and faith. Just as a sports enthusiast challenges their physical strength through grueling endurance exercises like long-distance running and heavy weightlifting, facing adversity puts your mental endurance to the ultimate test, although in a subtler manner.

To give you a more classic example, when the Mahabharata war came to an end,

Krishna visited the mother of the Pandavas, Kunti, and said, “Now you can live in peace because your sons are victorious.”

But Kunti prayed to Krishna, “Oh Krishna, please do not take misery away from me. My life has been constantly punctuated by misery, and now if you take it away I shall be unhappy. It is during these times of misery that I have learned the art of turning my mind to You, and I have gradually begun to enjoy spiritual Bliss. If you take away misery from me, I shall not have that taste of immense joy.”

The message of this figurative story is that if you have the insight that adversity is actually prompting your mind toward God, you will relax and calmly endure it with a spirit of heroism. You will eventually know that adversity will no longer be necessary when your devotion to God reaches significant spiritual heights.

If you find yourself thriving in wealth and abundance, yet fail to turn your thoughts towards God, you are facing true adversity. What could be more adverse for a person than not to be aware of the Self (God), the supreme object of love? On the other hand, if you remember God even during adversity, you are at the height of prosperity. Embrace the understanding that what may seem like adversity is actually a Divine test designed to strengthen your devotion.

As your faith becomes unshakable, adversity fades in every aspect of your life. A Sage understands that every situation is orchestrated by God as an opportunity for growth. Thus, one who is spiritually advanced views adversity as a Divine gift to be accepted with a spirit of surrender.

However, to promote that vision, it is important to maintain your *sadhana* with the regular practice of repetition of mantra (*japa*), prayer, meditation, and association with the spiritually wise. These practices should be part of your daily routine, enriching your subconscious mind with spiritual impressions. As a result, you will begin to enjoy the taste of Divine Presence. Once you have a taste of it, there is no challenge that is in-

surmountable; every circumstance unfolds as a Divine revelation.

If a mother wears a Halloween mask and wakes up her child, the child is at first terrified at seeing the mask. But, then the child smiles when he realizes that it is his mother behind the disguise. Similarly, adversity is the Divine Mother donning a mask. Once you realize what is behind it, you smile.

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