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Conversations with self-15

How to cope with problems

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ISSUE Everybody has problems, but instead of being overwhelmed, it's best to overcome them with an enlightened and a positive approach

'Pain is inevitable, but suffering is a matter of choice'— so many learned men have said. Just as we all have problems, how we choose to respond to them is a matter of perspective.

When I am overwhelmed, or at least imagine I am overwhelmed by a problem, be it at work or elsewhere, I have two ways to combat it — the unenlightened way and the enlightened way.

When I allow myself to be bogged down by a problem and if I examine my responses, I realise I am either: exaggerating the problem, underestimating it, or am indifferent to it.

Exaggeration makes me get agitated and I lose peace of mind. When I underestimate a problem, I allow it to escalate till it becomes too hot to handle. When I am indifferent, I neglect the problem and, therefore, the consequences of this neglect ultimately submerge me.

A positive way to cope and perhaps lick the problem is, first, to become aware of it. In so doing, I give myself permission to examine all the possibilities of overcoming it. The second way is to consider the problem as a challenge. When viewed so, it galvanises me into action and I respond to it with alacrity. A third way to handle it is to enjoy or have fun with the problem, and toss it around till a solution is found.

In following the awareness, challenge and fun path, we have a positive orientation that enables and empowers us to take charge. We can thus define the outcome and emerge the 'victors.'

In choosing the route of exaggeration, underestimation and indifference, we become 'a victim', trapped by circumstance rather than our own choice. At such moments, we feel forsaken and let down. Yet, if we analyse this feeling, we will realise we have authored it by walking down the road of delusion and misperception, sans enlightenment.

The true way to tackle a problem is the enlightened way of awareness and self-empowerment.

Many saints have said: 'Life is a mystery to be lived and not a problem to be solved'. If we approach life with joie de vivre, nothing is insurmountable.

In the Navy, there's a saying: 'The difficult we do at once, the impossible takes a little longer'.

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