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ANSWERS TO QUES-
 TIONS ON SPIRITUALI-
 TY, GOD AND LIFE
 by Dada J P Vaswani

Good people suffer to become pure

Why do bad things happen only to good people, while so many that are evil, have the best of life?

Bad things happen to good people that they may grow better, nobler, purer. Even as gold is burnt in the crucible to be cleansed of its dross, even so good people are chosen to burn in the fire of suffering, and so became pure as thrice-burnished gold.

Wealth and pleasures and power and honour are not as good as they seem to be. In many cases they degrade and make man corrupt. In our ancient books there is the suggestive story of Kunti. She had to ask for a boon of Lord Krishna. What she asked was that she might have some little suffering all the time. In suffering, she said, the Lord is remembered; in pleasures and enjoyment he is forgotten.

How true it is that suffering purifies! Not many know the value of suffering. It was an Indian saint who prayed, "Lord grant me starvation and sickness and suffering and ignominy!" These are the things that are of real value to those that know. This type of suffering is for our good. We do not understand this until we have cast all thought of self aside. When the self is forgotten, we behold the loving hand of God in every circumstance of life.

Everything that happens, works for our good. The seeming cruelty and injustice of men, their selfishness and ruthless disregard of values we hold dear, are seen to be the result of God's infinite goodness and unfailing love.

Dada, what is your advice to young students?

- Speak little and spend some time in silence every day.
- Listen to everyone, but do that which is right.
- Take account of each minute. Spend every minute wisely and well.
- Live a simple life. Do not imitate others. In simplicity is the secret of true strength.
- Spend your strength in the service of the surrounding world.
- Study with concentration.
- Take regular exercise.

How can we protect ourselves when fear strikes us?

Fear is a poison that circulates through the

entire system, paralysing the will, producing a queer sensation in some part or the other of the human body. Fear is the great foe of man.

Overcome fear the moment it appears or it will overpower you. And fear is a merciless master. Strike fear with the weapon of the spirit – the word, God. Utter the sacred name dear to you, the name of the beloved Krishna, Shyama, Jesus, Buddha, Nanak. Utter it again and again. Utter it in childlike faith and He, whom you call, will rush to your aid. Say aloud some prayer which appeals to your heart. When we are tormented by needless fear, when we are crushed by the blows of faith, we should turn to God in absolute faith and trust. When we link ourselves to him, we allow positive energies to flow into our lives. Helpful, healing, wholesome thoughts come to us during periods of stillness, prayer and meditation.

What should be our attitude towards the dead?

Though we are unable to see those who we call dead, though we are unable to hear them, they can nonetheless see us and hear us. They cannot hear our words, but they can hear our thoughts. For they whom we call dead are minds without bodies, and their minds can read our minds. They hear our thoughts. Therefore, we should be careful about our thoughts in regard to the dead. We should try to overcome our grief and send out to them thoughts of love and goodwill. We should pray for them and wish them well in their journey. Our attitude towards the dead should be that of a mother or a wife whose son or husband has gone overseas to seek his fortune. Surely the mother or wife of such a person would send him encouraging messages from time to time, words of love and goodwill and cheer. If, instead, the wife writes him letters containing tales of woe and grief, the condition of the husband would be miserable. He cannot go back to his wife to console her. And thinking of the sorrows of his wife, whom he loves, he feels unhappy. ☉

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Experience the normal process of grief

How can I learn to control my emotions? I am emerging from the breakdown of a close relationship and wish to use this opportunity to grow spiritually and stay positive.

You are asking me to help you escape by offering you a quick-fix magic formula towards positive thinking. I would never encourage escapism or diversion of any kind, as I do not subscribe to it, because it impedes true healing. What you need is not 'positive thinking' but 'realistic and rational thinking'. Moreover, you need to go through the absolutely essential and normal 'grieving process', after this loss of a close relationship. This process moves from a state of being in 'shock' or 'denial', to being 'angry', to 'mourning' the loss, to 'struggling with coping' and finally 'moving on'. All these stages have to be 'lived through' in this order for you to 'naturally' move on without bypassing any of these stages. You could begin journalling your present 'real' feelings whatever they are, and keep writing in the journal to complete the 'grieving process'. You will see the quality of your writing changing and moving through the various stages 'naturally', and it is only this that will truly heal you and enable you to move on.



I am a 25-year-old girl. My boyfriend lives abroad and we meet rarely. This disturbs him a lot and he goes into depression. His mother died when he was eight and I am the only person from whom he has received so much love and for whom he feels so deeply. His turmoil is agonising me.

Your boyfriend seems to be facing a childhood emotional deprivation and needs to heal himself of it, or else it will keep on corrupting his current relationships, which is already so in his relationship with you. You sound as if you pity him and also feel somewhat guilty for being away from him. The relationship that both of you share is one of co-dependency which is unhealthy for both. He 'needs' you and you have a 'need to be needed'. This kind of parent-child relationship that both of you share will cause major problems later on unless both of you grow out of this co-dependency. In the meantime your friend needs to see a counsel-

lor to help him live a more emotionally fulfilled life, with or without you. You too need to examine what kind of pay-off you are getting in this relationship by playing the parent role. If you don't introspect about yourself and increase the awareness of your motivations, you may land up in similar relationships over and over again. Whether you remain in this relationship or not, you need to change the dynamics from your side, i.e. you need to be able to find fulfilment in emotionally 'equal' or 'adult' relating. Remember – two people truly love each other only when they are capable of living without each other but *choose* to live with each other.

My family believes that emotions are a sign of weakness, and they tell me that if I am to succeed in life, I have to be unemotional. Please suggest means to overcome my emotions.

Emotions in themselves are not unhealthy, but a sign of sensitivity and being human. In fact, if you did not have emotions that result in the 'fight' or 'flight' response to a threat faced by you, the survival of your body-mind would be threatened. It is only extreme and self-defeating emotions such as rage, anxiety, depression and guilt, that need to be worked on by uncovering the irrational thoughts underlying the same, and changing them to more rational thoughts. When you think in terms of rigid insinences or have a demanding philosophy, or when you catastrophise events in your mind or do not keep things in perspective, or when you globally rate yourself or others, it will result in inappropriate emotions and dysfunctional behaviour. Therefore to reduce emotional distress, you need to subscribe to a more flexible philosophy of preferences, keep events in perspective without magnifying them in your head, and refrain from global rating. Training your mind to think more rationally will help you experience the necessary appropriate emotions which will help you engage in goal-directed behaviour. A cognitive behaviour therapist could help you in this task. ☺

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DR MINNU BHONSLE
OFFERS PRACTICAL
ADVICE FOR
RELATIONSHIP AND
MIND-RELATED
PROBLEMS

**by Dr Minnu R
Bhonsle, PhD**

Healthy food on the move

What is the best snack or filler when on the move?

Ready eats such as nuts like almonds, walnuts, cashews, pine, and seeds like pumpkin, cucumber, watermelon are a good option. Peanuts and chana are also great. Buy them non-fried & non-salted and salt them yourself with rock salt.

Many health and organic food companies sell snacks such as granola/cereal bars, fruit and nut bars, nuggets, chickis, little khakras, or chivda. Whole meal biscuits/crackers are also available. Washed fruit is the healthiest snack, albeit a bit messy.

Even chocolate, if healthy, is fine. Always read labels before buying snacks. Very often, the salt and oil used are not good for us. Avoid labels using words you cannot understand. Prefer chickis made with jaggery. Or make it yourself.

In fresh food sandwiches are the simplest. Be imaginative. My mother makes a fabulous snack by mixing left-over brown rice with vegetables, herbs and onion and baking or lightly pan-frying it like a patty. Easy to carry in between two slices of whole bread or even roti if you want to avoid the yeast. Any leftover vegetable rolled in a roti makes not only a good snack but a good meal too. Garnish with raw cabbage and coriander leaves. Indian foods like dhokla, patra, idli are easy to carry too. Get the packaging right so things don't leak. My other favourite is raw or steamed vegetables with some cold-pressed oil and seasoning, often just salt and pepper. Cheese if unprocessed (even organic) is a nutritious, satisfying and easy to carry snack too. So, have a tasty trip!

Some people tell us not to peel fruit while some tell us that, nowadays, it is better to peel them before eating as pesticides are often used in farming. What do you think?

Let me place some facts before you:

- Quite a bit of the nutrients are close under the peel. So unless you peel real thin, you lose out.
- The peel, besides being nutritious, is also good fibre content. A clean digestive tract

being primal to good health.

- Pesticides harm us infinitely and also destroy our fields, waterways and air. They harm us not just in this lifetime but in several generations.
- Do not stop eating fruit. Choose organic. Promote it. Remember the choice is ours.
- Choose more local and traditional fruit like ber, jamun, little apples and oranges, little custard apples, any small berries, gooseberries, lotus seeds, fresh dates, coconuts, desi papayas, water chestnuts. In all probability, they will not have been grown with pesticides because many of these grow wild.
- Seasonal fruit is safer
- If you have to eat non-organic fruit, scrub the skin well. If it still feels waxy, then peel as thinly as possible. If it tastes bitter/bad, spit out immediately. You can also soak and wash in a solution of one tablespoon apple cider/sugarcane vinegar mixed in half litre water.

My daughter is twelve. What specific nutrient/foodstuff should her diet include?

If you replace all refined foods with unrefined, there is no way you can go wrong with what is served at the table. Today there is no dearth of alternatives available. You can make popular foods like pizzas and burgers the natural way too. If you have opposition, at least eat well yourself, the example will influence her future habits.

Fresh fruits, lightly cooked raw vegetables including greens and whole cereal are essential. Chyawanprash is an addition (check with your Ayurvedic doctor about which one). You can also give her Spirulina powder (not tablets). Alfalfa sprouts, flax seeds, nuts, seeds, dried fruit are all great add on foods to the basic diet. But besides food, your daughter needs exercise, activity and sunshine. This should have her well-prepared for her teen years. ☺

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WHAT TO EAT AND
WHAT NOT TO EAT IS
A VEXED SUBJECT
THESE DAYS.
ASK THE EXPERT.
by Kavita Mukhi