

# **Satsang with Swami Dayananda Saraswati**

## **Arsha Vidya Gurukulam**

### **Difference between spiritual problem and psychological problem <sup>1</sup>**

#### *Question*

Swamiji, how can we tell the difference between a deep spiritual problem and a psychological problem?

#### *Answer*

An example of psychological problem, I would say, is finding that I am sad for no reason. Or, suddenly, I find I am panicky. Or, if there is something a little strange or overwhelming, I feel threatened. Perhaps I cannot be in crowds. I shy away from people. Or I may be afraid of authority which may be connected to some childhood problems or some parental problems. These are all psychological problems.

A spiritual problem is seen in someone who has solved all these psychological problems, for the most part, but who is still sad. He or she is considered to be “normal,” can interact well with people and so on, but is subject to his or her own yo-yo emotions—now high, now low. This is because down below, there is always a self-image which is as good as the body-mind-sense complex.

How then are we going to solve the problem? There is a legitimate fear, legitimate anger, legitimate sorrow—“legitimate” because society has accepted them as legitimate. Modern psychology says that anger is normal and that one must be angry if a particular situation warrants it. Similarly, there is “normal” jealousy and

“normal” sadness. Because they are “normal,” there is nothing wrong with them. These we solve spiritually. Vedanta says there is no such thing as “normal” sorrow. The use of the word “normal,” then, marks the difference between psychological and a spiritual problem.

Vedanta can resolve a problem if the mind is more or less normal. But, if the mind is abnormal, Vedanta cannot help because the person cannot handle the subject matter. It will not take hold. If, however, the person is unable to grasp what Vedanta is saying, but stays with it and follows all the attitudes and values properly, then it can help.

Vedanta itself has its own approach to psychology, normal psychology, that is. It is *rāga-dveśa* (likes and dislikes) psychology and includes prayer, meditation, and an understanding of values. If a person stays with it, follows it all properly, it can help. I consider this to be the best approach.

On the other hand, Vedanta has no answer for abnormal psychology. It cannot help people who are schizophrenic, for example. It will only confuse them, in fact, and is therefore detrimental. This is why, originally in India, and still today, there are those who will not teach Vedanta to just anyone. Only when the *guru* is satisfied that the mind is prepared will he teach the person.

It was a common practice, one that is still used today, that when a man with unprepared mind came to a teacher in Rishikesh, in the north of India, the teacher would send him on foot, to Rameswaram, which is in the deep south. He was told to go and come back—without money. “Then I will teach you,” the teacher would say. The idea was that by the time he came back, he would be normal—if he came back.

From the north to the south of India is some thousands of miles so that it takes about five years for a man to return. And anything can happen to him on the way, even marriage. That, too, is “normal,” especially if he does not have very much detachment towards the world. Or he may become so abnormal that he ends up in an institution. He may even try to find another *guru* who will teach him immediately. Either way, the teacher who sent him on this journey is satisfied.

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