

Chapter 5

TRIUMPH IN ADVERSITY

Adversity can make you or break you. It can mould your life and make it successful and beautiful or it can make you crumble. Adversity is like a strict teacher whose teaching is invaluable but nobody likes it. Everybody can come out of an adversity stronger, but it requires courage, introspection and effort. Several instances are there when people have been broken or shattered by an adversity in their life. But remarkable are those who do not bow down before difficulties but overcome them by dint of their effort; they rise above their problems, and find astonishing solutions in the face of difficulties. They are the ones who are truly admired and respected by all. They are the ones who make history. They are the ones who move ahead and grow to great heights; adversity makes them stronger.

There are two possibilities in an adversity: either it will defeat you or you will defeat it. Which of the following ways do you want to choose? If you want to defeat adversity then make it count.

Make adversity count

“A fighter never loses and a loser never fights.”

What has happened is past, how you respond is present. Focus on what can happen rather than on what has happened.

Never give up, fight till the last moment of your life.

Adversity is the moulding phase of life, bear with it and be patient.

Introspect and enquire.

A noble idea, a noble person, a noble cause always triumphs.

Do follow your routine, involve yourself in work and remain positive.

Look at the things that are right in your life as opposed to what is wrong.

Have faith and confidence in yourself, believe that you can rise above every situation and do your best. Eventually you will.

Enjoy the struggle. Focus on the present and enjoy the work; just detach your mind from all the things that cause you pain and focus on the work.

Fill your mind with positive thoughts. Have faith in God. Do whatever you can.

You don't have a quick fix for everything; it does not work all the time.

***'It does not matter where we are,
what matters is where we are heading.'***

—Anonymous

In his book, *The Wings of Fire*, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam narrates one very interesting incident. It happened when his dream of becoming an air force pilot was shattered, the dream which he had had all his life. He was very much disappointed and distraught; he then met saint Sivananda who spoke to him thus:

'Desire, when it stems from the heart and spirit, when it is pure and intense, possesses awesome electromagnetic energy. This energy is released into the ether each night, as the mind falls into the sleep state. Each morning it returns to the conscious state reinforced with cosmic currents. That which has been imaged will surely and certainly be manifested. You can rely upon this ageless promise as surely you can rely upon the eternally unbroken promise of sunrise and of spring.'

***'Moments of despair and adversity are the mirrors
that reflect the deepest truth of life'***

When in difficulties you delve deep within and think about your life and analyse your actions; these moments mould you just as the potter's wheel moulds the clay into a pot when it is wet. Adversity is like that potter's wheel which moulds you into a better, a more refined person. How you handle adverse situations is very important; so many people get disturbed and commit all sorts of unwarranted acts when things are not going well for them, yet there are others who dig deep and fight till they achieve what they want. They grow and focus on the things that can be set right rather than worrying about what has gone wrong. They are the people who waste no time in crying and complaining about what has already happened but, with all hope in the world, act and come out stronger and better after every difficulty.

Don't stop, keep moving

A Vietnamese boy failed in his school examination. He became very disappointed by his failure and started shunning the school. He did not like to go to school. One day when he was passing his time away from the school he saw a Buddhist monk chanting something, as follows.

'Why does water not get dirty? Because it flows, it doesn't stop.
Why does water never decay? Because it flows, it doesn't stop.
Drops of water make a stream,
The stream becomes a river,
The river becomes a sea,
The sea becomes an ocean. How? Because it flows and it doesn't stop.
Let my life never stop, let it flow, let it flow.'

The boy contemplated on the meaning of this verse after listening it with rapt attention and understood its real meaning. The verse proved to be a turning point in the life of this boy. He went back to school with renewed enthusiasm and developed a new outlook and started concentrating on studies.

He grew up to be a great leader of his country. He fought against foreign powers for 22 years. He fought with Japan and France for the freedom of his country and with America for the unification of his country. This man of Vietnam, who became the Prime Minister and President of his country, was Ho Chi Minh.

Never mind what has already happened in life; there are some things about which you cannot change; don't brood over the past, remember its lessons and forget the rest. You always have control over how you act and react in the present. Don't let your life stagnate by disappointments; a moment can change your life; act, just start today, right away, right now, don't hold back, instead make your life a life worth living. Don't forget that everything is within your grasp, you can always get it. Difficulties in your life are like the keys to the hidden treasures you have; value them and unlock the abundant reserves within you.

'The biggest opportunities come disguised in adversity.'

Stephen Hawking, a British physicist and mathematician, is considered the greatest theoretical physicist of the late twentieth century. He has contributed a lot to the study of black holes. He has explored the origin and evolution of this universe by his researches into the nature of space and time. He has also written several books. Among his books is the bestseller, *A Brief History of Time*.

Stephen Hawking was once asked, 'What do you feel about being in a wheelchair?'

'Not a lot ...I try to lead as normal a life as possible and do not think about my condition, or regret the things I can't do, which are not many.' By the way, he is not able to walk, he is not able to speak, his body is weak and he has to remain seated in a wheelchair all the time.

He further said, 'Before I was diagnosed with this condition I was very bored with life. But the prospect of an early death concentrated my mind wonderfully. I realised that life was good and there was a great deal I wanted to do. I can safely say I am happier now than before my present condition appeared.'

What a great attitude to life! The attitude with which one faces difficulties and trying circumstances is what makes an ordinary person an extraordinary one. Most of us waste our time, the precious time that is allotted to us, in engaging ourselves in worthless activities, but adversity sometimes makes us realise the value of time and life that is given to us. Even in the worst of situations, you can win, provided you believe in yourself.

Overcoming troubles

This young boy's father died when he was an infant; he had to face all the troubles and hardships to get education; he used to walk 8 miles to go to school, and sometimes had to swim across the river Ganga with books kept on his head to reduce the walking distance to school.

He was always in financial trouble owing to his father's early death; life was nothing short of a continuous struggle for him. When the other children of his age played, he toiled hard; his life took a turn at the age of sixteen when he was inspired by Mahatma Gandhi; after that he joined India's freedom movement and worked selflessly for the country. But the difficulties were far from being over; he was imprisoned many times by the British government; he spent about nine years of his life in prison.

He never stepped back but always forged ahead, with all the courage, in the world; he was a man of great moral character and unshakeable beliefs; finally he triumphed in life, playing a significant role in India's struggle for freedom; later he became one of the greatest politicians that India has ever produced; he was the second Prime Minister of India; he was Lal Bahadur Shastri.

A noble cause never fails, come what may.

Never think that you cannot rise above your problems, always think your problems cannot rise above you and you will overcome them.

Potential gains from adversity

Adversity makes you tougher and mature to handle difficult situations.

It gives you a deeper understanding of life.

It makes you realise that you are not the supreme; you can only act and do your best.

It makes you realise the value of life.

It enhances your inner growth.

It disciplines you and teaches you to utilise your resources, including time.

It enhances judgement.

It makes you focus on work harder and give up ordinary useless activities.

It builds and reveals your character.

It teaches you humility.

It teaches that nothing stays for ever, not even adversity.

It adds new dimensions to your life which you never had before.

Buddhist Lama Yeshe sermonises us to look at life in a manner that we can get rid of our anxieties and increase self-awareness—honesty, acceptance and sincerity can help in understanding life. He says,

- Death is a fact of life.
- Change is the only constant phenomenon.
- Life goes on.
- Life moves on like a river.

Understanding these things is a must in life. At some point or the other each and every one will be confronted with these. Pain and suffering will be caused if we do not understand them; they are an integral part of life like our existence. We cannot run away from them.

***‘When the heart grieves over what it has lost,
the spirit rejoices over what it has found’***

—A Sufi proverb

There is meaning in everything that happens; there is deep philosophy involved, lessons worth a lifetime to be had. Sometimes we may not superficially observe what we have gained but at deeper levels of consciousness there is a significant gain from all the suffering or bad times that one goes through. To understand what life is one has to go through these experiences; to appreciate all that is good, you must know what is bad. So in order to rejoice one has to go through suffering and develop a higher understanding of the meaning. Life cannot be celebrated without suffering or facing adversity.

'If God is with us, who can be against us'

—8.31, Romans

Trust God and have faith in Him. Do your duty and don't worry about other things. There are times when you cannot help things but even in the most trying circumstances and difficulties faith can help you fight back. Have faith in yourself and whatever you do, do it as well as you can, and always remember that sooner or later you will be the winner, whatever may be the situation.

Practise the art of dissociation

When the things are not happening as you would want them to happen, when you are struggling, try to dissociate yourself from the things that are happening. Remember when you were a child, you feared even an injection; it was the most painful thing in the world for you at that time. After some time going to school became the most painful thing for you. However, you became used to school and made friends, then the report card gave you trouble. It continues like this in life. Think about your biggest troubles five years back; now you can look back and dissociate yourself with those events; you can even smile at some of the troubles that you had. Similarly, whatever the distress you have, try to develop a sense of dissociation and see it as if you were watching it on the screen as a movie and become an observer. Everything will pass. Always remember whatever happens, happens for the best. Your troubles are your assets; find value in them.

The test of character is adversity.

The test of a friend is difficulty.

The test of toughness is pressure.

The test of strength is endurance.

The test of greatness is nobility.

The test of power is forgiveness.

The test of courage is taking the roads less travelled.

The test of success is in repeating it.

'If on your way to success you have not encountered adversity, chances are that you are not really successful; real success comes after adversity'

Most of the successful people owe their success to the difficult times they had had to face; there is a lot of introspection and self-examination that you go through when you are not successful. You don't do so when everything is going well, but when you are down that is the time when you do introspection and think about your weaknesses and try to improve yourself; that is what brings real success. The things that you learn when you are down are the things which help you to get up and reach greater heights.

Adversity is like friction

Science teaches us that resistance in the form of friction is needed for creating motion; without friction motion cannot be created as desired; even the tyres of the car would slide not be able to turn it or stop it. Thus friction is imperative for motion, though it is resistant to nature. Similar is the role of difficulties in life. Adversities create the necessary friction, which is important for us to move forward and make progress in life. They are the source of motion in our life; it appears that they are restricting our movement but, in fact, they ensure that we do not collide with anything by going too fast in a wrong direction. Realise the fact that you cannot lead a life without difficulties, so ensure that you get the best out of these adversities and that is the best thing that you can do. These adversities come to test your resolve, your attitude and make you a better person.

'Often it is adversity that makes one access the most valuable resource that is the power within; with it anything is possible'

There are a lot of lessons taught by adversity you begin to understand others, you grow, you learn to deal with difficulties, but perhaps the most valuable thing is that adversity introduces you to yourself, your real nature is revealed, doubts are dispelled; when you look within. It is adversity which makes you access the abundance that you have but you never bothered to tap it. You begin to understand yourself better. You become equipped to cope with changes once you know and understand yourself. Once you know yourself, you develop belief in the power within you and think that there is nothing that you cannot achieve.

'The purest ore comes from the hottest furnace'

—Anonymous

A very well-known person who fought with adversity and overcame his disability was Franklin D. Roosevelt; even though he was handicapped, he was in no way inferior to any person having no physical disabilities. He became President of the USA. Roosevelt was a handsome man; he was nominated for the Vice President's post at the age of thirty-eight. One hot day he bathed in the chilly waters of the Bay of Fundy and contracted paralysis at a young age and became crippled for life. He could not move his body below the waist.

But Roosevelt was not someone who would go down without making a mighty effort; he was a man of tremendous will power and firm resolve. He used them to fight against disability and achieved amazing success. After some time he was made the Governor of New York. He was diligent and worked hard as the Governor and was soon nominated and elected as President of the USA.

His task as the President of the USA was not easy. When he became the President, America was facing an economic crisis. Millions of people were struggling for jobs and were short of food, abodes and basic necessities of life. He worked hard and formulated a plan which bailed the country out of the crisis, thus proving his mettle as the President.

History of mankind is full of men who just did not accept defeat, no whatever the situation; whatever the difficulties they faced them with an ability that comes with poise. They were the people who had faith in themselves and fought against all odds; they were the people who were capable of doing things which the ordinary people could not imagine. A physical disability can paralyse your body but make sure that it does not paralyse your will power and mind, because they are most essential to win the battle of life. Roosevelt is a great example of achieving an astounding triumph.

***'Nothing can defeat you if you make up your mind
to fight, and nothing can save you if you have
accepted defeat'***

If you continue to do your best irrespective of the situation you are in, sooner or later you are going to change your life and circumstances. Look at the great leaders, like Gandhi, Lincoln and Roosevelt, and you will see something common in them. They were the leaders who grew up in adversity and that was what made them strong and honoured; their ability to handle difficult situations was a testimony to their fighting prowess in critical moments in life. They had to face a lot of hardships,

but they never accepted defeat. In fact with every blow their will power grew stronger and they fought harder and succeeded when nobody expected them to succeed. If you accept defeat, you cannot move forward but if you stick to your work and keep doing your best you create the best opportunity to succeed.

A remarkable comeback

His head was shaved with small markers and the doctors said to him, 'We're just going to make a little hole, pop it out, remove the lesions, put it back in and cover it up.'

They were talking about his skull. Suffering from chronic pain, Lance Armstrong's disease was diagnosed as testicular cancer that would eventually spread to his lungs and brain. The doctors told him that he had less than fifty per cent chance of survival, what to say of participating in a cycle race.

Tour de France is one of the toughest and most gruelling events for an athlete to participate in. One has to cycle more than 100 miles a day for three weeks straight in inclement and uncertain weather. Armstrong says that even some of the cars would break down under such conditions. It is almost draining for a human body. The cycle race involves a tremendous physical and mental strain. The riders sustain injuries and bruises and meet with serious accidents. They suffer aches and pains.

Armstrong participated in the race before he was diagnosed as suffering from cancer in 1996, and here is how he fared

1993 - Did not finish.

1994 - Did not finish.

1995 - 36th position.

1996 - Did not finish.

1997 - Did not enter.

1998 - Did not enter.

Tour de France is not an easy race to finish; he could not finish it three times. Not anybody on earth could have believed that this man would ever participate in a race which involved three weeks of gruelling and torturous peddaling after suffering from cancer. But this man had the strength of mind and conviction to do that; yes he was great Armstrong.

After being declared a cancer patient, and having failed to even finish the race in three of his four previous attempts, Armstrong again

started preparation with great perseverance, despite tough conditions, several injuries and painstaking efforts along the way, and he was again ready for the big event, finally doing what he loved the most, riding the bike in the most prestigious and the longest cycle race in the world. The battle was tough but Armstrong was tougher and, with all his struggle and effort, he won the race. No one could believe it but the miracle had happened.

When Armstrong won, some of the people lost. They were the sceptics who lost, they were not able to believe his winning the Tour de France. They believed it was a case of taking banned drugs and still maintained their scepticism. They were proved wrong again after his medical tests were found clean. The triumph of Armstrong is a testimony to the fact that all of us have a tremendous power to fight and the ability to triumph, come what may.

He won and created a record of winning the race no less than seven times. He won the race from 1999 to 2005, and made a world record as regards the number of Tour de France victories. It almost sounds unreal but it is the true story of a man who believes in his dreams, who believes in miracles, and who is willing to sweat and pay the price for success. The story of Lance Armstrong's the story is the stuff dreams are made of.

When things are not going well for you, that is the time for learning and deep introspection, that is the time when you ask yourself some of the most important questions of your life. Lance Armstrong mentions in his autobiography, about 2nd October, 1996, a day which was one of the most crucial days of his life when he was diagnosed as suffering from cancer. He says, ***'It remained the most important day of the year, larger than any birthday or anniversary or holiday, and it was a day, filled with introspection, of thinking about second chances.'***

He cherishes the day when his illness was diagnosed as cancer; which focused his mind on the task ahead and is one of the best things to have happened in his life. He called it, 'Carpe Diem Day', which means, seize the day. It is about turning your setbacks into opportunities; this is exactly what top achievers do. There are two ways in which one can handle difficult situations: one is to meekly surrender and the other is to fight, seize the opportunity and show extraordinary resolve, which is the hallmark of greatness.

Truth has power.

Boldness has magic.

Purity has strength.

Character has morality.

Practice has performance.

Honesty has trust.

Persistence has reward.

Selflessness has the world at its feet (immortality).

Good conduct has admiration.

Ceaseless striving has accomplishments.

***‘Very often the worst situations in life present
best opportunities’***

Very often the worst situations in life present the best opportunities. But we are unable to grab them as we are not ready. Walter Raleigh’s famous book *The History of World* was written during his imprisonment; the first Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, wrote *Glimpses of World History* when he was in jail. Adversity adds another dimension to you, which makes you accomplish great feats, dormant faculties become active and you are no longer the same person; your capabilities are enhanced, your perspective on life changes, you begin to take life more seriously and do a better job of it. He who has not seen adversity has not seen life. This extra dimension is what distinguishes the ordinary from the extraordinary.

So whatever the situation, the way you deal with it decides who you are, whether you succumb to adversities and crumble before them or you make an extraordinary effort all setbacks and misfortunes. Even in sports, the great players are they who excel when the team needs them most, when the team is in dire need, when the team is not in a good condition, when the conditions for playing are not favourable, when the going is tough, that is the time for the real test of a player. Special are those who excel in all these situations.

Everybody has the capacity to turn around but very few men actually do so. Are you one of them? Are you ready to face the challenges that life throws at you? Yes, you can face them. Always remember, adversities come to make you and not to break you.

Winning against all odds

Victor Frankl’s wife, father, mother and brother died in the concentration camps of Nazi Germany. He survived along with his sister. The experiences that he went through in the concentration camp were traumatic and torturing to say the least; amidst several barbaric atrocities they had

to face extreme hunger, cold and brutal assaults. Several times people were baked in gas ovens. Even Viktor Frankl had been under the threat of being consigned to the gas ovens many times.

He was writing a book, the manuscript of which—his life's work—had been snatched away from him. Any other person would have given up the desire to live and would have lost all faith in himself, but Viktor Frankl showed a triumphant spirit and eternal optimism and fought his way out of this extreme suffering.

He reasoned that even in the most terrible circumstances, people have the freedom to choose how they look at their circumstances and what meaning they draw out of them.

It was this spirit with which he lived and later developed a therapy called the logo therapy, and wrote several books, among which the book 'Man's Search for Meaning' became a runaway best seller, a book in which he described his experiences of the concentration camp.

Viktor Frankl remarked that there were two kinds of people who lived in the concentration camp. One, those who had a desire to live and chose to fight, and, second, those who gave up and had no interest in life and this kind of thinking made their condition worse and finally they died of misery and hopelessness.

It was due to his and others' suffering in these camps that he came to his hallmark conclusion that even in the most absurd, painful and dehumanised situation life has a potential meaning and therefore even suffering is meaningful.

One must have the courage to go through the pain with an attitude of gratitude which is the way to triumph in adversity. The greatest triumphs, the greatest victories, the greatest moments come when you learn to overcome troubles and come out stronger from the most difficult situations. Believe that you can confront your troubles and difficulties with strength and grow even in the most hopeless situations.

'The enormity of your problems is nothing compared with your ability to solve them. By overestimating the problem you underestimate yourself'

Viktor Frankl came out of the tragedies stronger than ever before. He wrote 32 books which were translated in several languages, developed the logo therapy and lectured and spoke at seminars all around the world. He is the recipient of 29 honorary doctorates. He stands as a role model for every man. His life is a lesson for all mankind as to how to get the best out of the worst situations. It is not just Viktor Frankl's

victory but a victory of human ability to win, in the toughest condition, the toughest battles. It is also a victory of the will power, conviction and human bravery.

Few men defy all odds and succeed when nothing seems to work in their favour, when they are down, when they are in a hopeless condition; they rise like the phoenix and set before mankind great examples to follow. They are the men who keep pushing up the limits of human excellence beyond imagination by coming out triumphant out of all the adversities which life can create for them. Not all men succeed in adversity but the adversity does bring out the best in men. Adversity makes men strong. Be tough and don't hold back from fighting; when you are pitted against difficulties see them as opportunities to grow and excel. Your conviction can conquer anything; don't be afraid and go for it.