

Gordian Knot

“ Turn him to any cause of policy,
The Gordian Knot of it he will unloose,
Familiar as his garter.” (Shakespeare: Henry V, I, i)

A ‘Gordian knot’ refers to a complicated and thorny problem.

The term comes from Greek legend. There lived a peasant in Phrygia called Gordius who was made king because he was the first man to drive his chariot into the public square of a town after the Phrygians had received an oracle that they should select the man who would come in a chariot as their ruler. Out of gratitude, Gordius dedicated his chariot to the god Zeus and placed it in the Acropolis. There he tied the pole of the chariot in the temple. The knot was so intricately tied that neither of its ends could be seen. This was the famous Gordian knot. A saying grew up that anyone who could untie the knot would become the lord of Asia. Many tried to undo it but to no avail.

Alexander the Great once visited the Acropolis to look at the chariot and the Gordian knot. Despite his wisdom, he could not find a way to untie it. Not happy to leave the knot as it was, he drew his sword and cut it straight through. Alexander then went on to become the conqueror of the whole Asia.

The expression ‘to cut the Gordian knot’ means to solve a difficult problem by a quick and decisive action. For example: “As the talks with the kidnappers had reached a complete deadlock, the police cut the Gordian knot by breaking into the house and freeing all the hostages.”

含英

咀華

快刀斬亂麻

東西方的典故有時不謀而合得令人嘖嘖稱奇。亞歷山大大帝用劍把難解的繩結斬開；無獨有偶，北魏的高洋面對相同的難題，也用類似的手法來解決。難道成大業者，處事非大刀闊斧不可？

高洋是北朝東魏大丞相高歡的二子，後篡位自立，改國號齊，是為文宣帝。《北齊書 文宣帝紀》記載：“高祖嘗試觀諸子意識，各使治亂絲，帝獨抽刀斬之，曰：‘亂者須斬！’”這段文字大意是說，高洋年少時，父親高歡設計考驗他和幾個兄弟的才幹，看他們能否把亂絲整理妥當。高洋的兄弟全都茫無頭緒，只有高洋一人決然揮刀把亂絲斬斷。

今人用“快刀斬亂麻”比喻以迅速果斷的方法去解決複雜難纏的問題。

例如：“自己一直在兩者之間不停地碰來撞去，而終於不能用快刀斬亂麻的辦法一下子徹底解決。”（巴金《談滅亡》）



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TOOLBOX

