

Dear Saurabh,

For every serious seeker it is vital to have a clear understanding of *Dharma* and its various facets . But as it is not a straight forward topic, I will discuss it in length, placing it in context with the four *purusharthas* (that for which a person strives for) as expounded in the Vedic tradition.

Human endeavors can be broadly categorized into four major categories:

1. *artha*
2. *kama*
3. *dharma*
4. *moksha*

*Artha & Kama* are pursuits of securities and pleasure, respectively. To put it simply, artha is making money or its equivalent, with this hope this will mitigate my insecurity. And Kama implies pleasure seeking; this could be gratification of the senses or intellectual stimulation or could be sheer laziness. For majority of us these two are main goals of life, most of our activities are directed towards fulfilling these ends. The reasons why they gain such precedence are:

- We are, as though, programmed to think in this pattern
- The results are visible & quantifiable and
- gratification is instant
- We know nothing else better to do as this is what seems obvious.
- Every one around us is in the same boat. Our loved ones and role models have lead their life following this pattern and would not allow us to move away. So we feel secured and don't question even if we have doubts.
- There is a genuine need for securities. We need food, medicine, shelter etc in day to living. The system is designed in such a way, if not anything else, at least you need food to go on. Similarly with pleasure, these are not so much of body but more of minds' need and should be dealt with.

There is nothing wrong with these two pursuits *per se*, but it is seen that most of us want *artha* to be come as much and as fast as possible and with pleasure the tendency is for instant gratification, thus we are ready to cut corners and flout the laws both written and unwritten and move away from *dharma*. Also these pursuits will take there share of time and energy and we would not able to give the same for contemplation, necessary for *moksha*.

During this course, going through the same experience, accumulating *artha* and indulging in *kama*, umpteen number of times, birth after birth, some rare and blessed *jiva* start finding this pattern as being repetitive and these two pursuits become a drudgery. He starts realizing they really don't offer what they promise i.e. securities don't me really secure and these pleasures are ephemeral and go after them is not worth the effort. He senses some kind of disorder in all this. Not only this he finds there are certain realities of life, namely death, disease & old age, which one cannot escape, these two pursuits do not offer any solution, in this regard\*. This is when he/she starts wondering whether is there something more substantial that life can offer, he sees need for a deeper order and freedom from this relentless quest to end this seemingly quenchable thirst of securities and pleasure. A *jiva* then turns towards finding permanent solution as an inexhaustible spring of water (*moksha*) and realizes that he earn this through conscientious living (*dharma*)

\*Symbolic representation of this was when *Siddharta (Buddha)* sees these realities and they became a turning point in his life.

Every soul is born with deep sorrow embedded in the psyche, like an inoperable congenital defect, producing constant dull ache and being incompatible with life. In the effort to put an end to it, he finds himself engaged in incessant struggle like someone lost in a maze, located in a madhouse, where every lunatic promises an exit after the next turn. It is after a series of disappointments he finds a sane source that ushers him to take the straight and difficult path (of *dharma*) for that will take him to a point after which he will find enough signposts that help him get out of the labyrinth.

*Dharma* centers around *Ishwara* which in turn depends on *shraddha*. Between our actions and the results there is law that operates which decides nature of results. Action is by itself inert and therefore cannot determine what would be the result. This thought is echoed in the first verse of *upadesh saram*\* by *Raman Maharishi*.

\**Karturajnyaya parapyate pahlam I*  
*Karam kim param karma tajjadam II*

The result of action is obtained by laws of the lord;  
How can action, which is inert, be ultimate?

Human mind is endowed by intelligence which can figure out to a certain extent what is the possible outcome of an action, but more often than not he finds that results are not in keeping with his expectations he either suffers unexpected losses

or sometime gets windfall gains. This leads him to think that results are arbitrarily decided but if he has *shraddha* he will realize that nothing can be arbitrary there has to be a basis and that basis is *Ishwara*.

*Shraddha* it is not a blind belief; like when I can figure out what's wrong with my body I place my trust in a doctor only then there is a possibility of cure similarly as I cannot figure if out with his limited intellect what are the possible outcomes of a given action (performed to solve my problems) I have to have *shraddha* in *Ishwara*. The difference is that a doctor's reasoning can be fallible but *Ishwara* is infallible.

Most of our problems, in the sphere of *Artha* and *Kama*, have been solved by us and this has lead to reliance on our abilities. We are generally confident of ourselves and we think we can figure out, so *shraddha* is not easy. But when one questions more complex issues of life like why does sorrow not end, once and for all, he will see his own inability and *shraddha* will naturally be a part of his disposition.

Actions produce two kinds of results seen and unseen and both can be favorable and unfavorable. Seen is, what manifests at the time expected by the doer but unseen will also manifest based on laws , the basis of the law is *Ishwara* .Since we all want favorable results, attempt to align our actions with the underlying incomprehensible laws of *Ishwara*, based on *shraddha* , is *dharma*. To put it differently: To be able to relate to *Ishwara* in our daily living especially in our actions is *dharma*.

Thus *dharma* is not just right and wrong but an appreciation it has a basis for both why it is so and its outcome; There are agnostics, who are ethical in there work, who adhere to their principles but meet unfavorable situations. As they fail to appreciate more complex nature things, quiet understandably, get disillusioned, over a period of time.

The prescription for the actions so that they can be directly related to *Ishwara* forms a considerable bulk of the Vedas and is referred to as *karmakanda bhaga* or the *purva mimamsa* where rituals & injunctions are prescribed in minute detail; the rest of the portion, which is less voluminous, is *gyan kanda*(*Vedanta*) or *uttar mimamsa* or to be precise the *Upanishads*.

In the present times the *karam kanda* seems to have lost its significance, it is practiced be priests whose intention is use it as business to make there living and not as means to grow, as a person. Also most of them are not trained properly as these rituals have a precise format that has to adhered during its execution for e.g.

we have use proper intonation while chanting of *mantra*, but I find barring few most don't give attention to these details.

Another relevant issue is that the injunctions (do's and don'ts) are in keeping with the times. This is valid not only to Hinduism# which has its roots in the Vedic tradition but also to other practicing religions across the board, most of the injunctions need to revised with changing times. What is therefore necessary is to understand, why these injunctions are prescribe in the first place to get to the bottom of it, therefore one should try to inculcate right understanding rather than prescribe or follow injunctions. Therefore it's the sprit behind *dharma* that one has to grasp.

# If one is fairly unbiased one can observe that when any religion or sect tends undermine @the importance of understanding over injunctions the result is dogmatism leading to irrational & heinous acts which are at times more gruesome than usual crimes with malicious intent acts. Thus you find terrorism espoused in the name religion; there cannot be greater adharm going on in the name of dharma.

The problem that arises is that I cannot figure out dharma on my own, people around me are in the same (defective) boat, what is prescribed has to a certain extent has lost its significance at present times, and I am desirous of freedom (*moksha*) and this will come about if there is order (*dharma*) in my life, so **how do I figure out & follow dharma?**

If one is blessed, then one can find a person or a teacher who leads a life of *dharma* and communicates the same, more as living example and less by preaching. Ideally he should know the relevance of dharma in context to moksha, should lead a transparent life that is accessible to other, should interact with people around and preferably know the scriptures/*shastras*, which he may consult if need be. Paradoxically this meeting itself requires *punya*, unseen favorable result, so one has to make humble beginnings with *dharma*.

*Bhagwat Gita* is a helpful compendium of the *Vedas*; complete in itself and structured in such a way that it brings out the timeless wisdom of *Vedas* more relevant to all ages, on both *dharma* and *moksha*, without making compromises. Having said that I must add a word of caution; most of the interpretations of *Bhagwat Gita* available in the market are unable to do justice to the depth and profundity of this glorious text. They tend to get lopsided and misinterpret it, at

times, to endorse their (interpreters') biases. So correct choice of interpretations## is necessary and then bringing the teachings down in our daily living.

## Dayandji's "Home Study" on *Bhagwat Gita* is one.

Broadly we can live a life in *dharma* if we can inculcate in our understanding these three general principles:

### **1. Yagna:**

Either: look at the cosmos as large machinery, well designed marvel of engineering, constantly in motion, in which ever part is serving a specific purpose keeping with the intention of the engineer. We look at ourselves as one of the parts, a cog in the wheel, and diligently perform our duties.

Or: we stimulate a miniature model and perform rituals keeping our minds on Ishwara.

The former become *karma yoga* where our actions become offering to the lord (*Ishwara arpan buddhi*) and results are cheerfully accepted with *prasadh buddhi*. These results can be bitter\* but as we know it is from the lord and therefore based on what we deserve. The emphasis, while we are engaged in action, shifts from results to doing our assigned duties. This neutralizes our strong hankering for material things and brings acceptance to all the unfavorable situations, we find ourselves in, now and then.

\*in some Indian temples we get bitter *prasada*

Later, in contemporary context, can be translated as time exclusively taking out, for Ishwara; performing *puja* or chanting/*japa* or any form of meditation. The love for *Ishwara (bhakti)* reduces love for the world (*Ishwar vasana* replaces *vishaya vasana*)

### **2. Dana:**

To share our resources with others. These resources need not be only material like money, food etc but can include time and energy sharing your knowledge, having a disposition to help others without expecting anything in return. The underlying principle is that life is a two way affair, we get so much from nature

and we need to pay back. We should acknowledge our indebtedness from obvious and not-so-obvious sources.

This neutralizes our tendency of being possessive about our assets and brings in a disposition and ability to help and share. In any case what is not due to us will go, in time, this prepares us for accepting losses with a poised mind.

### **3. *Tapas*:**

Leading an austere life. What's desirable is that mind does not naturally go towards indulgences. This happens when mind outgrows desires, like a child outgrows his liking for toys as he grows older, he does not make an effort. But we find this does not happen naturally and therefore we have resort to discrimination that is being able to understand that what brings instant pleasure will, in time, become a source for pain. (*viveka vairagya* or discrimination-dissipation). But, more often than not, neither *vairagya* does come in naturally nor even by doing discrimination then the conscious effort to cut down the indulgences is called *tapas*.

This directly neutralizes our strong likes and dislikes, thus all the aforementioned principles purify the mind (*antar karan shuddhi*) that is necessary for pursuing self inquiry which culminates in moksha

Among the various qualities necessary for a *mumukshu* that which is most significant is *vairagya*. Therefore need to have moderation in every sphere of activities including our eating habits and other mundane activities. But, as it takes time to bring *vairagya* in our lives, this should not lead to self judgment & self prosecution, and as discussed *vairagya* should preferably be preceded by *viveka*

Another important aspect of *dharma* is the 'Ethic of reciprocity' or as stated: "One should never do that to another which one regards as injurious to one's own self. This, in brief, is the rule of *dharma*. Other behavior is due to selfish desires." in *Mahabharata, Brihaspati (Anusasana Parva, Section CXIII, Verse 8)* this is a good guide to find out what's right and wrong in a various situation, especially day to day mundane interactions; but one can find oneself at more complex crossroads\* of life when discerning between the two (right and wrong) is not so straightforward. This has been emphasized in most of the religions and tends to remain the main focus; one should appreciate that *dharma* is not merely ethics but is more complex subject and encompasses many other aspects and has its bearing on events in our day to day living.

\*clash of two *dharma*s like *Arjuna* found himself was in the battle field between *ksatriya dharma*, to fight/kill and *manav dharma*/to refrain.

***Moksha***: is clear perception of our nature which is free from sorrow. *Dharma* does bring in order in our daily living as it promotes *sattva* and we gain *punya* this will make our lives pleasant and bring in contentment. But as it does not take care of self-ignorance we will, after a period of time, revisit sorrow. Therefore **though it is mandatory for a seeker that he understands the importance of *dharma* and brings it into his life, but he should not make it his final goal** (*parampurushartha*).

Rather he capitalizes on this relative freedom to gain absolute freedom by pursuing self inquiry, which is to find out the “one” for whom, has he gained *dharma*.

Every duty presupposes a context and its respective role like a doctor or a father has to perform his duties in taking care of his patient or son, respectively. In doing this we never question our real identities, for we don’t look at these “roles” as roles, we are doctor or father and easily get caught up with its *dharma* but it’s only from an extraneous source that can remind us that there is larger responsibility of finding out our true identity or *svadharmā*.

On this account *Vedānta* is often criticized that it tends ignore the problems of world/society/family and just concentrates on the individual salvation. Let’s examine this:

- *Ishwara* is the creator of the world, he knows and can solve its problems, better than any individual\*\* (unfortunately Marxist who eagerly take the role of world savior more than any one else don’t accept *Ishwara* and will not buy this argument )
- Society is composed of individuals as its building blocks; therefore solution to any individuals ‘problems is in turn helping the society.
- It’s logical that I first get my house in order than make correction elsewhere.
- Society/world rarely changes, like the proverbial dog’s tail which refuses to straighten out; there have been exceptional souls that have made significant change but were few & and far between, and the impact does not last beyond a certain time frame. In contrast sincere efforts to change ourselves are more fruitful.

In the earlier part of the discussion we have highlighted role of diligently performing our duties and contributing to world, but one should know his place in the scheme of things and should confine to it. Otherwise there is no end to world's problem and one can be perennially engaged in solving them, ignoring what is more close and needs urgent attention. Also, majority of those who set out with a clean intention to help others through social service, NGOs, etc, during their course they falter and move towards making it an easy way to make money or getting fame. This also can be seen happens invariably with most spiritual organizations or ashram. This holds true not just for society but even for our closed ones who can have numerous irrational demands and expect too much from us. One has to judicious and sensitive when it comes to dealing with them & should know, when & where, to draw a line. What I have said may not sound pleasant but as it has bearing on a spiritual seeker I will not refrain from stating them.

\*\* This thought is reflected in Milton's poem "on his blindness"

"God doth not need  
Either man's work or his own gifts: who best  
Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best. His state  
Is kingly; thousands at his bidding speed  
And post o'er land and ocean without rest:  
They also serve who only stand and wait"

Some more notes on these four *purusharthas vis-à-vis dharma*:

These distinctions neither are water tight compartments nor does one follow a single *purusharthas* exclusively. But there is a predominant goal for an individual *jiva*

*Dharma* has many other connotations attached to it, for e.g. it's the nature of a thing like heat is *dharma* of fire another common way *dharma* is used is: that which protects. I have restricted its meaning to its relationship with *moksha* as that what concerns us.

There is no good equivalent in English language or may be any other language to the word *dharma*.

In Buddhism *dharma* has a larger canvass and is a significant word in their philosophical text

The end result of these four *purusharthas* gets progressively subtler and closer to the seeker. *Artha* is easily seen is gross and is outside are while pleasures appease the



mind, *dharma* is more to do with the intellect and its gains are not easily quantifiable, and what could be more close to us, than ourselves, which is essence of *moksha*

*Artha & kama* is natural to us but *dharma & moksha*, as discussed, cant be figured out by ourselves therefore a dire need for an extraneous source, which in its pristine form is the *Vedas*. We do not consider the *Vedas* to have come out of a human mind, (*apurushiya*) no matter how intelligent or how refined that mind may have been. For us Vedas are words of Ishwara (*Ishwara vachana*). This is not a subject of scrutiny and thus requires *shraddha*

*Artha* is more to do with doing we are active and in *kama* we are passive and *artha* as though supplies for *kama*, only a secured mind hunts pleasures, similarly *dharma* is more to with actions and *moksha* is do with knowing and your gains in *dharma* fructify in *moksha* this is what I meant when I had said *dharma* paves the path for *moksha* in one of the earlier discussions.

But one should be able to distinguish them as two distinct entities. Many schools mix the two you, both old (*mimamsikas*) and new ones as you find many spiritual organizations prescribe a *sadhana* and swear by its efficacy by promising it's the most effective method for salvation.

The one who has figured out the essence of *moksha* (*jyani*) what ever he does is always in keeping with *dharma* as no axe to grind with the world. He personifies *dharma*.

As we see more meaning in pursuing *dharma & moksha* we will wonder why the world can't see what we see. Why this mad rush to make money; why such long q outside the ticket counter of such banal and boring film; so one needs to understand there cannot be consensus with respect to each ones *purusharthas*; as they say 'to each his own'. This helps to deal with world better and see the creation as *Ishwara's* play. So there is a place of a bank, a bar, a temple and *Satsang* in the creation, for they are all meant to serve the diverse aspirations each unique *jiva*

With Warm Regards,

Vishal