

The Doctrine of Dharma.

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WHAT IS DHARMA ?

Dharma has been defined by great scholars in the East and in the West in a variety of ways. In a generic sense it means the right and proper performance of action calculated to bestow the highest happiness on the performer both here and hereafter. Thus "Duty" is *Dharma*. "Righteousness" is *Dharma*. "Right moral law" is *Dharma*. "Virtue" is *Dharma*. Any action by the performance of which man brings good, peace and joy not only unto himself but also unto his fellow-men is *Dharma*. Moulding one's life and conduct in strict accordance with the Scriptural injunctions, never deviating from the beaten track, never yielding to the monstrous forces of vice and evil, come what may, is *Dharma*. Good thoughts, good words and good deeds is *Dharma*. Negating the body and asserting the glory and immortality of the Soul is *Dharma*. Self-abnegation and self-effacement is *Dharma*. Service of country and humanity in a disinterested and selfless spirit is *Dharma*. Pure divine Love is the core and cream of *Dharma* as well as its propelling force.

VALUE OF DHARMA

Of the four grand objects of human aspiration, viz., *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kāma* and *Mokṣa*, 'Dharma' is given the top-most rank in the scriptures. This clearly proves that only through the right performance of action according to the injunctions of the Śāstras can

man ever hope to achieve the crown and glory of all human endeavours, viz., *Mokṣa*, which is the best and the highest of all desirable things. In other words, *Dharma* alone is the gateway to *Mokṣa*, to Divinity, to Immortality, Infinite Bliss, Supreme Peace and Highest Knowledge. Therefore, only he who performs action in the prescribed manner, and no one else, is entitled to *Artha*, (wealth and property), *Kāma* (gratification of desires) and ultimately to *Mokṣa* (liberation).

THE FOUR CASTES

Humanity as a whole is classified under four distinct heads: viz., the Brahmans, the Kṣatriyas, the Vaiśyas, and the Śūdras. These are the four castes, the four divinely ordered institutions. From Brahmā's mouth was born the Brahman; from His two arms, the Kṣatriya; from His two thighs, the Vaiśya; and from His two feet, the Śūdra.

DUTIES OF THE FOUR CASTES

He who is endowed with equanimity of mind, good-heartedness, self-control, purity of nature, straightforwardness, continence, abstinence from injury, faith in God, almsgiving, austerity, forgiveness, self-sacrifice, compassion on living beings, absence of envy and pride, truthfulness, wisdom and knowledge; he who offers sacrifices and guides others in offering sacrifices; he who gives gifts and receives gifts; and he who takes delight

in the study of the scriptures and in imparting scriptural knowledge to others, is the true Brahman.

He is a Kṣatriya who is endowed with fearlessness, generosity, vigour, splendour, prowess, firmness and dexterity; who does not turn his back towards the enemy; who delights in acquiring fame, glory, honour, and good reputation; whose main concern is to protect his subjects; who offers gifts to Brahmans, who performs sacrifices and studies the scriptures; and, above all, who possesses the true marks of a ruler in other respects.

Trade, commerce, industry, agriculture, ploughing, rearing cattle, banking, doing charity, offering oblations to the fire and study of the scriptures are the duties of a Vaiśya. The duty of a Śūdra is to serve the other three castes willingly and wholeheartedly and do all sorts of menial work for them.

ORIGIN OF EVIL

While the origin of evil itself may be traced to an ignoble failure on the part of man to observe the sublime principles of *Dharma* in daily life and uphold it, the manifold maladies and evils that reign supreme and unhampered in this unfortunate Kaliyuga—the discords, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, world wars, jealousies, communal hatred, enmity between man and man, nation and nation, country and country—are again entirely due to the pernicious, the baneful, the preposterous, nay, the incorrigible tendency on the part of men belonging to one caste to abandon their lawful duties and madly clutching at and

grappling with the duties of the other castes. In other words, man has ignominiously dethroned *Dharma* and enthroned Satan or *Adharma* in its stead. The sad and pitiable part of the tale is that not only is this disease a virulent and fatal one, but that it is growing more and more virulent day by day and assuming larger and larger proportions from hour to hour. The only remedy and cure for this malignant state of affairs is for man to realize his folly, to rectify his blunder, and to return to the old order of things with *Dharma* enthroned once again in its supreme seat of sovereignty and glory. It may be useful, therefore, to din into the ears of our brethren the sound and solemn note of caution given by no less a personage than our Blessed Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa Himself in this very connection: "Better is one's own duty, though destitute of merit, than the duty of another well-performed. Better is death in one's own duty; the duty of another is full of danger." (*Gītā* III. 35). Again, "Better one's own duty, though devoid of merit, than well-executed duty of another. He who doeth the duty laid down by his own nature incurreth no sin. The duty born with oneself, O son of Kuntī, though faulty, one ought not to abandon; for all undertakings are accompanied with evil, as fire with smoke." (*Gītā*. XVIII. 47, 48)

UNITY OF ALL RELIGIONS

It is not Hinduism alone that lays special stress on *Dharma* as being conducive to the highest good; all good and great religions of the world such as Buddhism, Christianity,

Jainism, Sikhism, Zoroastrianism and Islam are all remarkably alive to its value. Buddhism minus its emphasis on *Dharma* is nothing. Christianity minus its doctrine of Love (which is only another name for *Dharma*) is equally nothing. So is the case with other religions. Nay, Plato, Socrates, Aristotle, Kant, Swedenborg and Spinoza, are all striking examples in the interesting history of Western Philosophy for the high pedestal on which they have placed morality, duty and righteousness, and adored them as the only means to the attainment of the goal of life. The only difference, if we may call it a difference at all, is that each of the religions mentioned above laid greater or less emphasis on certain aspects of *Dharma* to the exclusion of the rest according to the conditions, needs and requirements of their respective ages and peoples. Herein lies the grand and glorious unity and oneness of all religions !

CAUSES OF THE MODERN INDIFFERENCE TOWARDS DHARMA

One of the prime causes of the modern indifference towards and neglect of *Dharma*, especially in India, is the domination of this once great and holy land by an alien nation. The foreigner who rules over the destinies of India to-day has, to put it mildly, absolutely nothing in common with the high standard of culture, civilization, spiritual traditions and moral excellences that constitute the rich and happy heritage of the people of this sacred land and, what is even more unfortunate and worst

of all, has fully impregnated its soft and respondent soil with the destructive canker of materialism and the eat-drink-and-be-merry philosophy of Epicurus and his followers.

Secondly, the system of education introduced by the benevolent newcomer has been so slyly conceived as ruthlessly to crib and cramp the spontaneous and natural growth of the student's body, mind and soul and to produce a band not of men of genius and originality imbued with the spirit of independent and free thinking, but of slaves and clerks and typists and peons to do his bidding. The nett result is that our modern educated ladies and gentlemen have naturally no time nor mind to read the scriptures, to seek the company of holy men, Sādhus and Mahātmās, and to live an ideal life by putting into daily practice the noble and soul-elevating precepts of our ancient Ṛṣis and Munis with a view to saving their souls from perdition—so thoroughly have they imbibed the spirit and philosophy of their new master. Sense-gratification and enjoyment of sensuous pleasures have become the order of the day. Wealth, woman, wine, theatres, hotels, restaurants, motor-cars, and erotic novels and magazines are increasingly in demand,—not Sādhus, Scriptures, God or Soul. Is it any wonder, then, that *Dharma* has become almost a non-entity ?

THE PANACEA

The first and foremost step in the direction of remedying the host of defects and evils prevalent all

over the country to-day is, therefore, for the people of India seriously to view the situation in its right perspective, and stop at nothing short of attaining the country's political and economic independence. Having done this, they will have to restore the ancient Gurukula system of education, and the *Varṇāśrama-Dharma* (the laws of castes and stages of life) in all their splendour and fulness. The Gurukula system of education is the one and only one system that has been tried from time immemorial and found to be supremely suited to the conditions and needs of the people of this country. People will then have to adopt simple living and high thinking. The Brahman, the Kṣatriya, the Vaiśya and the Śūdra as well as the Brahmachārī, the Gṛhastha, the Vānaprastha and the Sannyāsī will each have rigidly to stick to his own duties and discharge his own responsibilities and obligations in life without encroaching upon those of others. Thus will *Dharma* be reinstated in its proper place. Thus and thus alone can we hope to usher in the new, happy and glorious era of peace, joy, universal love, prosperity and all-round progress. May Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa guide us in the quick accomplishment of this grand ideal!
