

## 44. What Is Dharma, What Is Not?

Vaaraanaasi Subrahmanya Shaasthry spoke so well about righteousness-virtue (*dharma*), especially the problem of right and wrong as brought out in the episodes of the *Mahabharatha*. Of course, as he said, right and wrong have to be decided in each case by the analysis of the particular context, with reference to some fundamental principles. Those principles have been visualised by sages and laid down in the *Vedas*. That is why the *Veda* is declared to be the root of *dharma*. Ganapathi Shaasthry brought out this primacy of the *Veda* in his talk. Both of them have already served you a fine banquet of wisdom. The time is 6.25 p.m. and Ghantasaala, who is to give a musical recital, has already occupied the attention of most of you. Ghantasaala tells me that he needs about half an hour to begin, so, it seems that I have to keep you engaged until he is ready, whether you like it or not!

Naturally, I always speak of *dharma*, for I have come to reestablish it. I have no other work here. I give sweet drinks to the ignorant and nectar (*amritha*) to the illumined. You cannot infer that *dharma* is declining only in India just because all the *Avatars* you know took place here; the *Avatar* has to take shape in the place where *dharma* originated and where it is still studied and valued. The rest of the world is but the branches of this tree. For Me, there is no native land or foreign land. All humanity has to be brought back to the path of *dharma*. The *Veda* is “Not ascribable to human skill or authorship;” the Soul of *Veda* (*Veda Purusha*) is not ascribable to any one country. *Veda* emanates from wherever you yearn for it. All religions and *dharmas* are but proliferations of *Vedic* truths.

### Intentions of actions should be pure

Human nature has to be chastened, controlled, and guided along certain channels; otherwise, like the flooded Ganga, it will bring disaster to millions who rest in security, believing it to be harmless. The haste to secure an immediate advantage has to be cured, the later advantage may be more lasting and more healthy. Benefits to the individual have to be given up in favour of benefits to the group, the village, the community, the country, or the whole of mankind. Ideas, principles, laws, customs, codes, habits, actions — all are to be judged on the twin points of intention and consequence. Is the intention pure, is it born out of love (*prema*), is it based on truth (*sathy*)? Does it result in peace (*santhi*)? If yes, *dharma* is enshrined in that action or law, custom, or conduct. Intention and consequence are the two bunds that guide the flood waters of the Godavari safely into the sea, which can swallow any amount of river water.

In fact, it is the rule and the restriction that gives charm to the game of life. In the game of football, if any player can do anything with the ball and there is neither foul nor out, neither offside nor goal, neither throw nor penalty, then it will be a meaningless game incapable of giving bliss.

### Principles on which dharma is based

Now, how are you to decide in any particular case what is *dharma* and what is not? I shall tell you some principles that you can use on such occasions. That which does not inflict pain on you and on others — that is right, that is *dharma*. So act in such a way that you get joy and others also get joy.

Or, take another standard for your actions: Make thought, word, and deed agree in harmony. That is to say,

act as you speak, and speak as you feel. Do not play false to your own conscience; do not cover your thoughts in a cloak of falsehood; do not suppress your conscience by forcibly enslaving it and embarking on actions not approved by it. That is the *dharmic* way of life

Frequently doing right makes it easier and easier. Habit grows into conscience. If you are once established in right conduct, you will automatically follow the right. What you do depends on what you are; what you are depends on what you do. The two are interdependent to a great degree.

Or, there is another principle. *Dharma* trains you to be calm, level-headed, secure in equanimity. You know the transitory nature of success or failure, riches or poverty, joy or grief, appointment or disappointment. You are not elated or deflated. You are serene, unmoved. Anything that helps you to maintain this unruffled stability is *dharma*.

To cut it short: sensual life is *a-dharma* (against *dharma*); spiritual life is *dharma*. *Dharma* is that which sustains, saves, and sanctifies. Man is born and is given a lease of life so that he may earn the knowledge of His identity with the Infinite.

There are differences between the limbs of the body, but they all belong to the body; it is foolish for them to imagine that they are unconnected with the body. The sun sends out a million rays, but they all belong to the sun. The sun is reflected in a million pots of water, but though they all are tiny images of the sun, the sun is the truth and the reflections are all relatively unreal.

### **Do not have a double standard**

One common definition of *dharma* is that it is the adherence to the rule, “Do unto others what you wish them to do unto you; do not do unto others what you do not wish them to do unto you.” Do not have a double standard. Treat all as your own self. That is to say, you must have faith in yourself, and only then can you have faith in others. You must respect yourself and respect others. Egoism is the measure of altruism. Mankind is one community; harm yourself, and you harm all. Make a person stand erect, and that act makes you stand erect. The treatment you wish others to render to you is itself the measure of your duty to them.

The *Vedas* and the *Upanishads*, which form the *jnana* (spiritual wisdom) and the *upasana* (worship) sections of the Eternal Religion (*Sanathana Dharma*), are the best guides to the path of *dharma* for mankind, for all classes—the family, society, the professional group, and the individual. Just as Delhi is the capital of India, India is the spiritual capital for all mankind. It is the responsibility of Indians to demonstrate in their lives that *dharma* confers on them peace and happiness, so that the rest of mankind may get the inspiration to follow the same path.

Prasanthi Nilayam, 1962-10-05