

## Dharma

धारणाद्धर्ममित्याहुर्धर्मो धारयते प्रजाः । यत्स्याद्धारणसंयुक्तं स धर्म इति निश्चयः॥

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cDharma - A divine power through which the entire universe's actions are protected and supported. It is the foundation stone on which world rests. Maharshi Ved Vyas says that,

शक्तिरेव धर्मः । योग्यतावच्छिन्ना धर्मिणः

Be it *jad* or *chetan*, the power or energy without which the existence of that substance is meaningless, is known as Dharma. For example, the dharma of fire is heat, the dharma of a magnet is its magnetism, the dharma of mankind is humanity. It is only in humans that a sense of dharma and adharma is found. Therefore, even when extremely unhappy man should not breakdown and give-up. Having attained this life-form, the form of a human, Man can reach even the state of Liberation by following the path of Dharma.

उन्नतिं निखिला जीवा धर्मणैव क्रमादिह । विदधानाः सावधाना लभन्तेऽन्ते परं पदम् ॥ i.e

through Dharma all life forms can gradually progress and finally attain the state of enlightenment, Liberation, Bliss, Moksha. When life has the form of any other living being other than human; its food, sleep, fear, reproduction etc. are all dependent upon nature and happen in an orderly manner as regulated by nature, in-sync with nature. It is only in the human form, that a being, in an attempt to dominate nature can start to live a life unregulated by nature, in disharmony with nature. This is the reason why Man's development or progress starts to face obstacles and he starts to degrade. At that time it is the power of Dharma through which he can again change the course of his life towards progress. In other words, by living a life in harmony or in-sync with nature he can gradually progress and finally reach the ultimate state – this is Dharma. On the other hand, living in disharmony with nature causes degradation - this is Adharma. Maharshi KaNad has said in 'Vaishishik Darshan': यतोऽभ्युदयनिःश्रेयस विद्धिः स धर्मः । i.e., that through which worldly pleasures as well as Moksha is attained is Dharma. Like the Almighty, Dharma is also present everywhere and is for the welfare of all. From Dharma, innumerable faiths, belief-systems, all the 'Arya' and 'Anarya Dharma' that currently exists on earth have originated. The difference between *Arya* and *Anarya* dharma is; when in all things/ topics there is focus towards spirituality, *Sadachar* (good behaviour), *Sateetva* Dharma and *Varnashram* Dharma (Dharma based on the theoretical classification of occupation) , it is known as *Arya* dharma and when these are not the focus then it is *Anarya* Dharma.

Nature is 'Trigunatmac' (composed of three *gunas* or qualities) – *Sattva guna*, *Rajo guna* and *Tamo guna*. Indicators of *Sattva guna* are Knowledge and light (as in destroyer of darkness. Darkness here stands for confusions, illusions, ignorance). Indicators of *Rajo guna* are pride and feverishness in actions. Indicators of *Tamo guna* are laziness and ignorance. Through increase of *sattva guna* the path towards Moksha gradually becomes simpler. Therefore it can be said that any action that results in *satva guna* is dharma. Since all actions that man performs fall under the category of dharma and adharm; eating, sleeping, drinking, sitting, seeing, hearing etc; all actions can be associated with dharma and adharma.

In this entire universe, two kinds of actions are seen – one is *Jad* and the other is *chetan*. The world of *Jad* encompasses all non-living things and all living things other than man because other than man all living beings operate under the influence or superiority of nature. Their consciousness is directed

by nature. Therefore they cannot perform any new actions based on their intellect that is against their nature. However, Man's eligibility reaches the domain of 'Chetan' as well and hence, with the help of his intellect he is capable of creating and performing new actions. By virtue of this man can reach great heights of development or great depths of degradation. Since man has the ability to acquire Gyan (Knowledge); through perseverance he can progress, attain enlightenment and become liberated. He may also choose the path of deterioration through which he will again end up in the world of *Jad*. Except Man, all living beings have a large proportion of *Tama* and hence they are rendered incapable to really analyse and brood on the topic of Dharma. However, once human, the life form becomes capable to pursue Dharma and hence it is only Man who can come close to attaining enlightenment or Liberation. Consider this example, a person drowning in a turbulent sea is atleast thrown up once by the waves, and at that point if he maintains his cool and makes some effort he has a good chance of ending up safe on the banks. However, if he gets nervous and loses judgement then his chances of survival become bleak. Similarly, nature blesses every life form and makes them eligible to understand and follow dharma by giving them atleast one human life. It is in man's hands whether he follows the path of Dharma and attains liberation or not. Therefore, it can be said that, all those actions that result in man's progress are called Dharma and all those actions that make man a slave of objects, entangle him, degrade him are Adharma.

Dharma has three main wings – *Daan* (donation), *tapasya* and *Yagna*.

“यज्ञो दानं तपश्चैव पावनानि मनीषिणाम्”। Any of these when pursued for an individual's development is known as *Yagna* and when they are pursued for the development of all then it is called *mahayagna*. For example, giving *daan* (donation), doing *tapasya* (penance), praying etc. for one's own well-being is *yagna* and if these same acts are done for the well-being of all then it is known as *mahayagna*. Out of these three wings, by pursuing even one path completely in a 'sattvic' manner one can reach the ultimate state of Liberation. Different aspects of Dharma such as forgiveness (*kshama*), donation, Truth, Knowledge, not-stealing (*asteya*), *indriya-nighraha* (subduing the dominance of senses) etc. can be practiced by one and all, irrespective of their caste, religion, societal differences etc.

**Daan (donation) Dharma:** *Daan* dharma is such that it is easily available to each and every person. Therefore it is one of the foremost tendencies of dharma and is of great aid in Kaliyuga. Lord Manu says in the Smriti :

तपःपरं कृतयुगे त्रेतायां ज्ञानमुच्यते। द्वापरे यज्ञमेवाहुर्दानमेकं कलौ युगे ॥

i.e *Tapodharma* (penance) in *Satyug*, *Gyandharma* (Knowledge) in *Tretayug*, *Yagna* Dharma in *Dwapar yuga* and only *Daan* Dharma in *kulgyug* will be considered primary. To remove one's relation with one's object and give it to others is *Daan*. Unlike *Yagna Dharma* or *Tapo Dharma*, where a lot of physical effort is required, *daan* dharma is simple and easily accomplished. It gets accomplished by just picking up one's object and giving it to others. Hence, it is very straightforward. Although it is easy to just give away a thing, one must be watchful, because it is not that easy to disassociate with one's thing or to remove one's attachment with that thing. The extent to which one is able to let go of that object from the *chitta* is a measure of the excellence/ superiority of the act of *daan*.

*Daan* dharma is of three kinds: *abhaya daan*, *brahma daan* and *artha daan*.

**Abhayadaan:** This is related to saints or Gurus. This is not for the common man. The guidance or teachings of a Guru, a saint that take one towards Enlightenment, Freedom, Truth is *abhayadaan*. Therefore, only a few, selected people are eligible for this.

**Brahma daan:** Any *daan*, given for the growth in knowledge be it through physical acts, words or wealth; either directly or indirect is known as *Brahmadaan*. For example: establishing a school, distribution of books, teaching of scriptures etc.

**Artha Daan:** Any *daan* related to wealth, money, luxury etc. is known as *arthadaan*. Food, clothes, land, jewels etc. fall under the category of *artha daan*.

The act of *daan* is considered *Sattvic* when it is performed with generosity, considering the times and laws of the land, considering the worthiness of the beneficiary and without expecting anything in return. However, when *daan* is given expecting something in return or when there is some turbulence, irritation etc. while giving then it is a *rajsic* act. And finally if the *daan* is given with defiance or to a non-worthy candidate then it is considered as *Tamsic*.

It is possible to experience Liberation through *Sattvic* daan, experience worldly & *paar-laukik* (non-worldly) happiness through *rajsic* daan and sometimes experience hell through *tamsic daan*. Just like how even a small ember or a spark, since it possesses the annihilation strength of fire, can burn and destroy any large object if the situation and time are right. Through every *sattvic daan*, the tendency of *satva-guna* increases steadfastly in the conscience of the donor and gradually takes him closer to the state of Liberation. This is because *daan*, being a dharma, possesses the complete strength of Dharma.

नास्ति दानात्परं मित्रमिहलोके परत्र च। अपात्रे किन्तु यद्दत्तं दहत्यासप्तमं कुलम्।। (अत्रि संहिता)

i.e there is no friend like *daan* in this world. However, *daan* given to a non-worthy candidate brings sorrows for seven lives! Therefore it is advisable to recollect the three qualities of *daan* (*satva-rajas-tamas*) and their tendencies before performing the act.

**Tapa:** To forgo physical and mental comforts and make the mind and body free from doubts, illusions, confusions is *tapa*. When an animal is tied, its force and ability to work increases. Similarly, by isolating the mind, body and senses from worldly pleasures and comforts and directing them towards *tapa*, extraordinary powers can be attained. It is through this power of *tapa* that rishis and saints in the olden days could perform divine or miraculous acts. The organ/ body part whose *tapa-shakti* is increased results in the seeker attaining extraordinary power associated with the that organ/ part. For example through *tapa* of speech, in addition to many different results or powers that a seeker experiences, the accomplishment of *vaak-siddhi* (power of speech, whatever is said comes true etc) is definite. *Tapa* is of three kinds; *Sharirik* (related to body), *Vachik* (related to speech) and *mansik* (related to mind).

**Sharirik Tapa:** Worship of Gods, Guru, enlightened souls; simplicity, *Brahmacharya*, non-violence, serving elders; belong to this category. Through practice of *Sharirik Tapa*, a man's life, knowledge, glory and strength increases. Without making any effort towards any of embodiments of *Sharirik Tapa* it is not possible for one to progress in this action-oriented world. By accomplishment of *Brahmacharya Dharma* extraordinary strength can be achieved. Through this the gross as well as the

subtle body become extremely powerful and as a result of this man can make accomplish a lot of tasks. Similarly, he who practices the dharma of non-violence cannot be harmed by anybody.

**Mansik tapa:** A calm and pleasant mind, a mind devoid of hatred and violence, purity of the mind and emotions, *mann-nigraha* (preventing the mind from wandering, running behind objects) are called *mansik tapa*. It is through *mansik tapa* that the *chitta* attains '*samyawastha* (a stable state where there is no wavering) and as a result of this a Brahman (he who is focused on Brahma) attains brahamatwa and worldly people move closer towards enlightenment. It is through this *tapa* that a seeker's *chitta*; full of doubts-illusions, duality is able to become calm and steady and thus experience happiness. This unadulterated *chitta*, devoid of duality, gradually marches towards enlightenment.

**Vachnik Tapa:** To speak the truth, to speak for the welfare of others, to speak politely and pleasantly, to speak so as to not agitate others, to recite the vedas and other scriptures form part of *vachnik tapa*. Words that are spoken in the best interest of the person (being spoken to), taking into account the times, the location and the person; is the truth and is in accordance to Dharma. In Manusamhita it is said:

सत्यं ब्रूयात् प्रियं ब्रूयात् न ब्रूयात्सत्यमप्रियम् । प्रियञ्च नाऽनृतं ब्रूयादेष धर्मस्सनातनः ॥

i.e Speak the truth, speak pleasantly. If the truth causes pain do not speak it. If something sounds good but is false; do not speak that as well. This is a dharma that has been practiced since time immemorial.

This world is a result of *Tapa*. In *Taitareeya Upanishad* it is said that after the Great Dissolution (Mahapralay), in accordance with the prarabdha of all the life forms, there arose a desire in the almighty's conscience - the desire to become many from one. At that time through *Tapa* HE created the entire universe and himself permeated the entire universe as the supreme power. There is nothing in this universe that cannot be attained through *tapa*. The ultimate goal of life is enlightenment and it too can be attained through *tapa*. An excellent *sadhana* for a Brahmin is *tapasya* for *Gyan* (Knowledge). Protecting is a Kshatriya's *tapasya*. Farming, animal husbandry, business etc are a *Vaishya's tapasya* and *seva* is a *kshudra's tapasya*. 'एकोऽहं बहु स्यां प्रजायेय' this verse confirms that through *tapa* misdeeds fade away and a seeker becomes eligible to walk the path of enlightenment. In summary, through the pursuit of *sharirik, mansik, vachnik tapa*, man can accrue extraordinary powers and gradually make great progress to finally become worthy of attaining self-realization.

**Yagna:** This can be divided into three main categories. *Karma-yagna, upasana-yagna, gyan-yagna*.

**Karma-Yagna:** The prevalence and dominance of *Karma* (actions) is observed everywhere in nature. Vedas and scriptures define three kinds of actions; *Nitya, Naimittik and Kamya*. Actions that when not performed bring bad results and when performed do not necessarily bring good results are defined as *Nitya karmas*. All the main actions prescribed for a particular *varna-ashram* (theoretical classification based on occupation) fall under this category. By not following these duties or not performing these actions it is not possible to efficiently execute tasks or continue to remain part of that *varna-ashram*. For example, a king's duty as per his *varna & ashram* is to look after his kingdom.

Those actions which when performed bring favourable results and when not performed do not cause any harm are known as *Naimittik karmas*. For example, visiting holy places (*teerth*) definitely bring good results but not visiting them doesn't bring unfavourable results. The greatness and power of these holy places is due to divine powers. These powers or energies are ever-present at these locations and by just coming inside their boundary worldly desires wane and *sadbhavana* (well-wishes, good feelings for the welfare of all) is born.

Those actions that are performed for the fulfilment of some special desire are known as *kamya-karma*. For example *yagna* performed for the birth of a child. At the root of these actions is desire.

Just by the difference of *bhav* (emotion/ feeling) the same action sometimes is *naimittik* and sometimes *kamya*. For example, if someone goes to a *teerth* with a goal to just visit then it is a *naimittik-karma*. However, if he goes there to fulfil a particular desire then it is *kamya karma*. The great sages have classified actions based on their hierarchy as *Adhyatmik* (spiritual), *adhidaivik* (relating to Gods & Goddesses) and *adhibhoutik* (worldly). Actions that result in the fulfilment of a wish through others are *Adhibhoot*. For example, serving food to saints (*sadhu-bhojan*) etc. *Yagnas* are *Adhidavik karmas*. Through these actions, the divine powers become pleased and bring favourable results. Actions that relate to the growth of Knowledge (of Liberation) are *Adhyatimik karmas*. The intellect is of foremost importance in these actions. Indulgence of senses in objects and lack of adherence to Dharma brings downfall upon man and actions such as study of vedas, tapasya (penance), acquiring and assimilating Knowledge, control of senses, serving a Guru etc are aids on the path of Moksha. Through *karma* the veil of impurity, through *upasana* the veil of unsteadiness and through *Gyan* (knowledge) the veil of ignorance, falls down.

***Upasana Yagna:*** Methods, solutions that have been prescribed in the scriptures, shastras to take one close to God is known as *Upasana*. The almighty is bliss, *Sadbhav* (love and mercy for all), and *chitta-bhav* (*chetanta*).

Since actions are related to the world, through *Nishkaam-Karma* (actions performed without any desire) a seeker continues to grow and spread his consciousness and finally merge with the Supreme Power's consciousness and thus attain HIS state of love for all.

In the path of *Gyan*, since it is associated with the Almighty's *chitta*, as a seeker assimilates *Gyan* his ignorance dissolves away and he experiences the *chitta-bhav* of Almighty. The Almighty's bliss realises to *upasana*. 'रसो वै सः।', this says that the Almighty is a form of bliss. By experiencing this bliss all fears get destroyed. It is through this bliss that all life forms are created, protected and it is through this bliss that all the lives come to end as well. Since this power of bliss is present everywhere, it is the root of all the 'juices of life'. Due to the different states and forms of *maya*, this Bliss appears as happiness through different objects and entangles man. Where *Maya* has no dominance, there is complete bliss. Great men have attained this experience of bliss through *upasana*. In this world, what appears as happiness is nothing but a mere glimpse of bliss. The object in reality gives no happiness. The happiness is not in the object but is due to the momentary *ekagrata* (single-pointed focus) of the *chitta*. In summary, all actions that are focused towards distancing the *chitta* from an object and taking it closer to the Lord is *upasana*. There are many forms of *upasana yagna*; *Brahma-Upasana*, *Awataar-Upasana* (*upasana* of the Almighty's incarnations), *Upasana* of Rishis, Gods, *Pitar* (forefathers) and *upasana* of ghosts and other decadent things. *Upasana* has the power to transform a man on a decline and steer his course towards

progress. Through *upasana*, a seeker gradually changes his nature towards *sattvic*-tendencies and moves in the direction of development. Ghosts and other decadent things are related to *tamsic* tendencies. Therefore they are worshipped by *tamsic* people burning with desires. Nature has three divisions, *adhyatmic*, *aadhidaivik*, *aadhibhoutik*. *Rishi Shakti* is the director of the *adhyatmic* division, *Daivi* (relating to Gods & Goddess) *Shakti* is the director of *aadhidaivik* division and *Pitru Shakti* (relating to forefathers) is the director of *aadhibhoutik* division. Their *upasana* is superior to the *upasana* of devils or ghosts and stands in second place. *Upasana* of Lord's incarnations is superior to the above two *upasanas*. The incarnations of God are for two main reasons; protection of *dharma* and destruction of *Adharma*. The next stage in *upasana* is the *upasana* of *Sagun* (having form) Brahma and the final stage is the *upasana* of the *Nirgun* (having no form) Brahma; these are the different stage of *upasana* that a seeker practices based on his ability and moves closer to God.

Bhakti or devotion is the life of *upasana*. Just like how without *praan* (life-giving force) it is impossible to live or grow; similarly without *bhakti* in *upasana*, a seeker cannot progress. For spiritual progress, be it any path a seeker follows, *upasana* is of great help in the accomplishment of that path. For example, blinded by ego when one considers oneself to be the 'doer' (*karta*) one gets trapped by the actions. To become free from such entrapments and to become successful in *karma-yoga*, *upasana* is of great help. Similarly, even in *Gyan-Yoga*, *upasana* can help the seeker progress. With devotion for the Almighty, a seeker pursuing *Gyan Yoga* can gain and assimilate the elements of *Gyan* faster. Without *bhakti* in *upasana*, *Gyan* transforms into parched-knowledge giving rise to atheism and empty argumentation.

Therefore if *bhakti* and *upasana* exist at the root of any wing of Dharma then a seeker can never falter on his spiritual journey and he will reach the ultimate state with God's grace.

**Gyan Yagna:** Attaining the state of self-realization or Liberation happens through *Gyan*. Without *Gyan* Liberation is not possible. 'ऋते ज्ञानान् मुक्तिः', By means of *Gyan* all tangles due to ignorance dissolve, all doubts and confusions disappear and *Sanchit* & *Kriyaman* karma get destroyed. All this is possible due to the great *Shakti* (power) of *Gyan*. This *Gyan* is obtained near a '*Tattva Gyani*' Guru through *jigyasa* (curiosity/ interest to know) and *seva* (service). He whose *chitta*, even for a moment, becomes steady in Brahma, receives the result of visiting all the holy places, performing thousands of *yagnas*, worshiping all the gods etc. To step onto such a superior path one has to have the eligibility. An eligible seeker is he whose conscience has become pure through the practice of *karm* and *upasana*, who has the wisdom (***Viveka***) to see what is permanent and what is temporary, who is not enchanted by worldly pleasures (***virakti***), and who is accomplished in ***Shamadishatak*** and ***Mumukshatva***. *Shamadishatak* refers to the following: *Shama* means the ability to stop the mind, *dama* means to separate the senses from external objects. When the senses that have returned from external objects can no longer stand those objects then it is known as *uparati*. To happily withstand heat & cold, praise and insult etc. is known as *Titeeksha*. To have faith in a Guru's words is *Shraddha*. To be *ekagra* (single-pointed focus) in Almighty's thoughts is *samadhaan* and the desire or wish for moksha is *Mumukshatva*. Thus by becoming proficient in all these a seeker becomes eligible to listen to *tattva-gyan* from a Guru. *Shravan*, *Manan* and *Nididhyasan* are the three wings of *gyan yagna*. To listen to elements of *TattvaGyan* from a Guru's mouth is *Shravan*. To think, meditate upon the words spoken by the Guru is *Manan*. The flow of favourable thoughts relating to Brahma is

*Nididhyasan*. By appropriately practicing these three wings one can attain the state of self-realization.

Gyan is light, the destroyer of darkness. Through Gyan ignorance is annihilated. Gyan or destruction of ignorance or Moksha; they are all one and the same. It is not that Gyan results in some kind of an action that dissolves ignorance; just by the state of Gyan ignorance or illusions fade away. Just like how light destroys darkness. There is no scent of any kind of action in Gyan. In other words, Gyan is not a result of any particular action and hence there is no question of methods or procedures in Gyan. The result of Gyan is Moksha.

Just like how a small spark of fire has the potential to destroy the entire world, every wing of Dharma has the potential to take one to Moksha. However, if this energy is not used judiciously and is directed towards *Tamo Gunas* then due to misuse of the power it can bring harm as well. Therefore, if the Dharmas are not followed as prescribed then some kind of detestable tendency originates in the seeker. The Sages call this *Unmad*. For example: if *Daan* is not performed rightly then it gives birth to arrogance. If *Tapa* is not performed as prescribed then anger is born. If actions are not performed as prescribed then pride and *moha* (love without wisdom) is born. Hence, one must follow any one wing of dharma in a *sattvic* manner by which he/she can attain the state of Moksha.

When Shastras say that in Kaliyug, Dharma would decrease to such an extent that only one part of it would remain, they don't mean to say that beings worthy of completely following Dharma could exist only in Satyayuga and that they cannot exist today. Just like how Dharma existed in its full glory in Satya-yuga, it exists today as well. There has been no change in its nature, character. However, in Satya-yuga there was focus on Dharma and now in Kaliyuga we see more of negligence, disdain towards it. Consider a well, since there is concentration of water in it many people can fully dip themselves in it. However, if that same water was removed and spread over a vast piece of land then even an ant won't be able to fully dip in it! Similarly, in Satya-yuga wherever there was Dharma, it was complete, concentrated. But in Kaliyuga today, filled with *tamas*, the focus or concentration towards dharma is broken and due to this welfare of mankind is difficult. In the well, the water was concentrated and not wide-spread and when that same water was spread all over then it lost its concentration. Although the quantity of water in the well or on land remained the same, due to loss of its concentration its power changed. The development of strength of Dharma as was commonly seen in people in satya-yuga, that same energy (*Shakti*) still exists but its complete manifestation is seen very rarely now, in few blessed souls.

धर्मैव जगत्सुरक्षितमिदं धर्मो धराधारकः। धर्माद्वस्तु न किञ्चिदस्ति भुवने धर्माय तस्मै नमः॥

i.e it is through Dharma that the world is being protected. It is Dharma that is holding the entire universe together. In this entire world there is nothing other than Dharma. Therefore salutations to Dharma - a form of Brahma.

**Brahmavadini Dr. Gargi Swami**