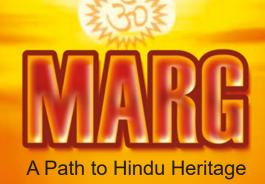
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## MARG

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We also invite our readers to send their comments regarding the *Marg* articles, or about other issues falling within the scope of *Marg*. We reserve the right to select, abbreviate, and edit for clarity submitted materials to conform to the editorial policy of *Marg* and the available space.

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# AUSTERITY

### THE MYSTIC PATH OF INCREASING JOY

What is austerity? Most people think of austerity as adopting discipline that some is uncomfortable for the body for a spiritual purpose. In the name of religion and devotion, people all over the world practice austerities. You have heard of beating and monks nuns themselves with whips. In the Himalayas, you will see some people seated in the Ganges River at three o'clock in the morning trying to endure the icy cold water. Then there are people who gaze without winking for hours and hours and people who fast for a long time. Some people take up the vow of not speaking (mauna) when they are teenagers and do not speak a word until they are advanced in years!

Many observers are amazed by these practices and consider them something quite extraordinary. People say, "How great a Saint this person is; he has been practicing austerity for such a long time." But from an advanced point of view, these external things should not delude you.

Real austerity has a Divine purpose. Austerity is a mystical process that enables you to purify your mind and brings you closer to God—that is real austerity. Austerity must make your body and mind fit for a higher purpose. If, instead, austerity makes your body crippled and your mind Swami Jyotirmayananda

stunted, that austerity has no meaning—although it may be quite dazzling to the masses.

#### AUSTERITY TAKES YOU THE MASTER OF YOURSELF

Practicing austerity implies adopting a life of healthy discipline. Learn to wake up at a certain time, perform your duties without being sluggish, and promptness develop and punctuality. All these are austerities. In the beginning, austerity may seem bitter. Your ego may complain terribly. But gradually as you persist, you begin to enjoy it.

For example, when you first begin rising in the morning at four o'clock for, meditation and Yoga exercises, you may have difficulty adjusting to your new pattern for a while because you are not accustomed to it. If anyone awakens you to help you keep your vow, you may get angry with that person. But as you begin to pursue this new discipline, you begin to enjoy it. Now you expect people to wake you up, and if they do not wake you up, you become angry with them!

When you begin to enjoy a disciplined life, it is no longer discipline. Austerity should not fill you with a sense of pathos. You should not feel that you are renouncing something or practicing something painfully

difficult. Rather, austerity should be considered a Divine luxury for an aspirant because it allows you to be a master of yourself, not a slave.

When you lack austerity, you become a slave. A lave may be given all types of rewards, and have wonderful robes and ornaments, yet he still lives a life of dependence. Similarly, though you may have a lot of things, if you lack austerity and discipline in your personality, you remain dependent on the circumstances in the world around you for your happiness. This process of austerity enables you to become a master of yourself.

In the Gita, Lord Krishna speaks of three types of austerity: satvic, rajasic, and tamasic. Tamasic austerity is a gross form of austerity that is characterized by inflicting pain on oneself or on others.

Suppose, for example, a person feels intense hatred towards another. Somewhere he reads that a particular mantra will destroy the enemy, and that if he were to repeat that mantra while standing in the cold Ganges for hours at a stretch the mantra will be quickly effective. So, early in the morning he enters the Ganges and stands there repeating the mantra. People observing him think he is a wonderful ascetic, but all the while his mind is



building up terrible negativity: "Now the mantra is going to gain power, and when the mantra is effective, I will throw off my enemy and crush him!" That is tamasic austerity.

Rajasic austerity is characterized by show, ostentatiousness. A person who is hypocritical may externally show himself practicing great austerity, but internally, in his private life, there is no real practice of self-restraint. For example, a person on the spiritual path may assert, whenever he is in the company of others, "I do not like any sweets; I am rigid in my diet." But when he is alone, he runs to his home, opens the refrigerator and starts eating ice cream and cake. That is rajasic austerity. Rajasic austerity is done receiving honor for and admiration, even though there may not be any basis for it, and it is selfish in nature.

Satwic austerity is the austerity that an aspirant must understand and practice. In the seventeenth chapter of the Gita, Lord Krishna gives a comprehensive outline of such austerity, indicating that it is of three types - +physical, vocal and mental. You practice austerity with your body, with your speech and with your mind.

#### THE THREE ASPECTS OF SATVIC AUSTERITY

#### PHYSICAL AUSTERITY

One aspect of physical austerity implies serving saintly personalities, spiritual preceptors, and men of wisdom. Such people have a mission designed to help humanity, so as you serve and adore them, your personality also is utilized for serving humanity. Your body becomes a disciplined tool for serving a greater cause, and you learn the art of using your energy for the good of others. Thus, through satsanga (good association), as well as obedience to Guru and a spirit of selfless service, one practices this aspect of satvic physical austerity.

The next aspect of physical austerity is arjawa or simplicity. Arjawa implies allowing your body to be simple. Through your body, you should exude simplicity, not ostentatiousness. Do not put on airs as you interact with people. Rather, an aspirant who desires Liberation must discipline his body, his manner, his movements so that he is ever ready to bow down in humility before the Self in all.

When there is conceit within your mind, it reflects in your very bones. When you keep your head held high for every reason, calcification develops in the spine naturally. But when there is flexibility and adaptability in your personality, it allows the prana (life-force)'to flow in the body more freely.

In the early stage of spiritual practice, when you bow down before a Deity or before great personalities, your mind may not be ready for it; but as you physically begin to bow down your mind becomes inclined to do so. Your mental state reflects in your body; in tum your physical state influences the mind. Therefore, you begin your austerity with the physical body and it affects the mind.

There is an interesting story that gives insight into this quality of simplicity. There was once a great Saint whose fame was Spreading everywhere. Living at the same time was a learned scholar who was also devoted to scriptures and was quite well known, but who was not as advanced as the Saint. The scholar developed a sense of jealousy towards the Saint, and in his heart, he began to wonder, "Could I ever be considered important by this Saint? Could the Saint ever touch my feet? Everyone bows down to me, but if the Saint were to bow down to me, that would be something great. But how can that happen? It is impossible."

Overwhelmed with this obsession, the scholar made a plan. Feigning great honor and devotion, he approached the Saint and invited him to his home for dinner. Cheerfully the Saint agreed.

On the day that the Saint was to arrive, the scholar set his scheme into motion. At the entrance to his home there was a low and narrow door that caused people to duck their head down as they entered. From the top of the door, he hung his sandals by a string, so that as the Saint entered and ducked down, his head would strike against the sandals, and he would fall down at the feet of the scholar!

When the Saint arrived, his head did strike against the sandals, just as the scholar, in his attempt to belittle the great man, had planned. However, the Saint clasped the sandals to his head,



and he said: "How kind you are. I have pain in my back, so it is difficult for me to bow down. But now you made it easy. I could touch your feet with my head." Hearing that, the scholar was amazed. Instead of being hit hard by the insult, the Saint simply revealed his powerful humility and simplicity. He radiated the of fragrance true arjawa (simplicity and purity of nature). Of course, the scholar, deeply touched by the Saint's humility, fell at the feet of the Saint and resolved to follow the path of true saintliness. Another aspect of physical austerity is ahimsa~---non-violence towards others. If, in a certain situation you are provoked and there is an urge to express your anger physically, do not do so.

Still another aspect of physical austerity is shaucham or purity. Develop the habit of healthy living. Promote cleanliness in your clothes and surroundings, cleanliness in your body and a deeper cleanliness in your pranas by taking recourse to the right type of food and exercise to keep the body free of toxic substances.

#### VOCAL AUSTERITY

The next aspect of austerity is vocal austerity or discipline of speech. This is of greater importance than physical austerity because speech plays a tremendous role in human life. Through words you can prosper, and through the misuse of words you can degrade yourself. One great source of prosperity and progress is mastery over speech.

Lord Krishna teaches that austerity of speech consists in not

speaking words that cause agitation in others. Do not misuse the great gift of speech by making other people upset or angry. It also consists in telling the truth. Your words should communicate that which is true and not false. When you speak the truth, however, it should be to help others. If you are going to hurt others by speaking the truth, it is better not to speak. There is a saying: "Satyam Vada Priyam Vada, Navada Satyam Apriyam " It means, \_ "Speak the truth, but speak that which is gentle. Do not; speak the truth that hurts others." If your words hurt others, you simply create reactions and bitterness.

You may recall the incident in the Mahabharata in which Draupadi laughed at Duryodhana. As he was touring a palace that had been recently built, he noticed that things had been constructed in such a way that where there was solid ground, it looked like shimmering water, and Where there was water, it looked like the ground. As a result, he became confused. What seemed to be a wall would turn out to be thin air, and what seemed to be nothing but empty space would turn out to be a hard wall. Thus, he banged himself against those "transparent" walls as he walked; around. He would even lift his garment thinking that the 5 grounds below was really water.

Draupadi was watching all this in an amused way, and finally she broke out laughing, saying, "Look at the son of the blind man." The words that "son of the blind man" were true. He was indeed the son of a blind man, King Dhritarashtra. Nevertheless, Draupadi's intention was simply to hurt his feelings. He was so hurt that he made up his mind to re- venge himself on Draupadi-—and that helped bring about the Mahabharata War, in which thousands upon thousands of people were killed. There were many other causes for the War, but Draupadi's misuse of speech was one of the triggering points.

So, one must be extremely cautious when speaking because speech is a powerful gift from God. The blessings of speech are immense. Only when you watch people who do not have the gift of speech and compare yourself to them can you realize what a wonderful gift you have.

Through the discipline of speech, you can sing the praises of God and help other people. You can also learn scriptures such as the Upanishads and Vedas, which were written to be recited.

In brief it is important for you to note the importance of not using words that are intentionally meant to hurt other people's feelings. This is the main point to remember when practicing austerity of speech.

#### MENTAL AUSTERITY

Lord Krishna says, "Manah Prasadah (cheerfulness and serenity), Saumyatwam (gentleness), Maunam (silence), Atma\_vinigraha (control of senses), and Bhava Samshudhi (elevated feeling of the heart) these are called the austerity of the mind." (Gita 17:16)



#### MANAH PRASADAH

In order for you to control your speech, your mind must first be controlled. Therefore, a set of practices has been enjoined to bring this about. The first aspect of austerity of the mind is manah prasadah-—allowing the mind to be joyous. People who have been accustomed to thinking of austerity as something crude will be surprised. "How can austerity be joyous?" they might ask. In Yoga philosophy, austerity is not supposed to give you pain, but discipline you so that the spirit flows in a healthy, unobstructed way through your personality. Thus, the effort to maintain cheerfulness of the mind is a dynamic aspect of austerity.

Many people have developed the habit of allowing their minds to become negative. You can often tell such people by the way they droop their heads. You must watch your own mind very carefully. Try to develop the philosophy that the world is an expression of the Divine creation. There is intelligence and a guiding purpose behind the world; you have nothing to worry about. There should be no room for grief, dejection, and sorrow in your life.

Always think of the positive things that you have acquired and accomplished. By thinking of the blessings God has given you, you will have so many reasons for being cheerful. More than anything else, understand that the Divine Hand is sustaining your personality at every moment. The awareness that Divinity is with you can fill your mind with joy. By always adopting this philosophy of loving God, you allow your mind to be serene and joyous. Do not develop negative thoughts. When they do arise, simply be a witness to them.

When you keep your mind in a negative state, you will be steadily generating negative impressions, and your mind will be forced to stay negative by the weight of the impressions. Due to the weight of the impressions of sad- ness and sorrow, you will not be happy even when you find yourself in a wonderful situation—a situation you have been craving for a long time.

This is so because your experiences of joy and sorrow are intimately related to the impressions of your unconscious. Therefore, an important part of austerity is not to let your mind be negative. Hold your head high, and let your mind be joyful.

#### GENTLENESS

The next aspect of austerity is saumyatwam (gentleness). When you confront a situation that provokes your mind into becoming agitated or inactive, simply look at it without building up ill will towards anyone. Let your mind stay gentle, composed, and detached. You will discover a spiritual strength within yourself.

Otherwise, by reacting to external situations, you allow your mind to become agitated. An agitated mind creates negative impressions in your unconscious. Gradually a habit builds up. Your mind constantly reacts to things no matter how they are. If you are looking for absolute perfection according to the concepts of your ego, you will never find it; there will always be something to irritate your mind.

If you are vulnerable to negative influences, or if you are already predisposed to react to something negative, then all you need is just a pretext. A leaf might fall on your head, and it would be enough to put you into a state of agitation, figuratively speaking.

Saumyatwam implies that the mind becomes serene, calm, and unaffected—just like the face of Buddha. When you watch a movie, you are always aware of the fact that all the happenings on the screen are mere appearances. Therefore, though you feel sorrow the at tragic developments, you are not deeply affected in your heart. Similarly, be a spectator to your mind and its changes, and know that faith in God will ultimately make you truly gentle.

#### SILENCE

The next practice relating to the mind is mauna (silence). If you watch your mind, you will notice that a great many thoughts enter it constantly. After a while, it is as if a lively discussion is going on deep in your mind. The world may be quiet around you, yet your mind might be as noisy as a marketplace. This should not be.

When you are engaged in various actions, watch your mind. Do not entertain conflicting thoughts and do not allow the mind to be agitated. Rather try to relax your mind. You should be like a swan as it enters the lake



and sports with the waters, but the moment the sport is over the swan shakes off the water particles. Much in the same manner, perform your duties well in the world, but the moment you retire, shake off all your tensions and worry and relax in the arms of God, in the arms of Divinity within.

The thoughts of the mind should be as still as a lake without waves. You can do this by turning your mind to God and practicing japa (repetition of Divine Name). Mentally repeat the Name as you allow the feeling of Divine Presence to develop. Gradually your mind will become calm. Calming the mind is a constant project for an aspirant.

#### BHAVA SAMSHUDDHI

The next austerity of the mind is bhava samshuddhi. Bhava feeling. means All human experiences are based upon the feelings that you have. When you see a dear relative, a certain feeling develops. Within society, the feelings that exist between different people play a great role. The same human being that gives you great joy today can give you great sorrow tomorrow if the feeling changes. Therefore, you must learn to watch your feelings and observe the types of feelings you hold within your heart.

Develop the quality of grasping what is positive in others so that your feeling is always magnanimous. Do not draw to yourself the negative qualities of others. If you have built up a bitter mind, each time you see the faces of people you will find, "Oh, here is a crooked nose." "There the ear is twisted." In other words, you will feel that everyone has a particular type of error, and you will conclude, "This world is filled with useless people. What is going to happen to the world?"

You must understand how much you are hurting yourself when your mind continuously focuses on the negative in others. As time goes by you realize how much negativity you have stored in your unconscious. Why not change your attitude so that you go on filtering which is the best? Look at any person and realize that God is shining through his eyes, and that the Divine prana (life-force) is pulsating through him.

All people make mistakes. However, despite those mistakes there is always something in everyone that you can admire. If, at the moment, you can perceive no such admirable quality in the other person, then just keep your mind detached. But do not go on looking for defects and keeping your mind filled with negative feelings.

In trying to remove the impurities of your personality, hold before you the ideal of these three types of austerity. In a provocative situation, people tend to commit three errors: physical involvement, bitter words and ill will. In the plan of Yogic austerity, first learn to restrain the body, no matter how agitated you may be. Then strive to control the speech, and finally you will succeed in controlling the ill will of your mind.

For example, the root of ahimsa or nonviolence lies in your mind. In your mind itself there should not arise any thought of injuring others. But when you are trying to control your mind, and trying to remove an impurity, you begin with your physical body. If, in a certain situation you are provoked and there is an urge to express your anger physically, do not do so. At this stage, when you are not yet evolved enough to attack the mental root of your impurity, let the anger be confined to your Restrain your body, mind. because if you do not do so, you will become involved in many complications.

Then the second thing you should restrain is your speech. When you restrain the body, your speech may take over and compensate for physical restraint! Although, relatively-speaking, it is better that you are just speaking and not physically doing any harm, you must learn to restrain your speech as well as your body. Even though your thoughts may continue to run wild, if you are able to restrain the body and the speech, you are in a better position to attack your thoughts.

If you are truly practicing austerity of the body, speech and mind, the impurities of your personality will be destroyed. The potentiality of your spirit will shine forth, just as gold shines when it is melted. And that is the purpose of austerity—to purify the unconscious, which will enable you to enter higher levels of spiritual experience. Whoever

# COSMIC LOVE

Swami Lalitananda

Nothing is permanent here. Although the mind rejects this fact and repeatedly attaches itself to objects that seem to promise enduring happiness, it is unable to escape the blazing truth of the transitory nature of phenomena. Therefore, the mind moves from frustration to frustration.

Man is prompted by the desires of his subconscious, so Nature in her cunning cleverness weaves for him a web of secret authenticity around ephemeral objects. She compels his senses to reach out and embrace the objects as if they were the very Self.

Desires for objects scorch the heart, feed the cravings of the subconscious, and ultimately throw the mind into chaos. Frustrated by failure, the mind seeks compensation by admiring the seeming glitter of other objects. A desire-ridden nature cannot be trusted and is the vilest of enemies for an aspirant. Overcome weak by will, constantly under the sway of infatuation, dying of and "consumption," reason seldom exercises her staff of viveka (discriminative understanding).

#### AUSTERITY

CONT. from Page 7 becomes a blessing for himself and for humanity. All that is good, beautiful, and divine is possible through austerity alone. Raja Yoga of Patanjali Maharshi states (Samadhi Pad, Sutra 37), "Vita Raja Vishayam Va Chittam" - One attains steadiness of the mind by meditating upon the minds of desireless Sages."

The mind of a Sage is calm and still, like a placid lake without waves, in which the transparent waters reflect the moon. Because that mind is devoid of impressions of attachment and hatred, the Moon of the Supreme Self reflects in it as Bliss unbounded. If one emulates the example of Sages and Saints and meditates upon their nature, one develops purity of heart. Mind becomes steady.

Within a short time, the impressions of serenity blossom into a state of delightful joy, and the mind, with its senses withdrawn, tums away from worldly objects. Such a mind loosens the grip of demanding desires and moves to a height beyond human imagination. The apparently solid reality of the world loosens its hold.

At sunset, from the balcony of a house by the seashore, one watches the expansion of the sea

"May you shine with the radiant power of austerity!"

at sunset, from the balcony of a house by the seashore, one watches the expansion of the sea with its long extending beach. . .. sees moving figures gradually lose their features, and as the sun continues to decline in the west, mere silhouettes walk....and soon all is sunk in darkness. And after the termination of night, dawn wakes up to deck the world with a new reality.

Similarly, what seems so real today gradually vanishes when dispassion develops towards the objects of the world. The apparent reality of objects sustained by the illusion of desires gradually disappears. Desires in their subtle forms remain in the subconscious in the form of vasanas (subtle desires), and even these are engulfed in the widening expansion of the Self. Then, with the dawn of knowledge, one experiences the supreme state of Liberation.

From that glorious state, there is no return. There is no pain or pleasure, no struggle or strife, no grief or sorrow! One swims on.... unto the shining sea of Oneness and Cosmic Love!

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## AHIMSA (NON-VIOLENCE)

HH Mahant Swami Maharaj (BASP)

Talk given by Swamiji on "Value" and "Ahimsa" - Non-Violence in Robbinsville, New Jersey on October 2, 2023.

#### AHIMSA (NON-VIOLENCE)

А core principle within Hinduism is living a nonviolent (Ahimsa) life. This extends beyond principle physical violence. Ahimsa is the Hindu belief that symbolizes love, genuine care, and compassion towards all, strengthening the spiritual foundation. Ahimsa is Divinity within all of us realizing equality by seeing all as the children of God. The mindset of spreading non-violence and equality for all humankind was far superior to our life. The salient request to "Impart these principles to each and every human, then we will have a place that is filled with love non-violence. Nonand violence is the universal path to peace, from individuals to families to all of society. Swaminarayan Bhagawan established non-violence as the highest form of our duty. It is a new measure to live in a nonviolent manner. It was urged to see God in all and hold the belief that every person has a right to live. The path of Ahimsa calls for everyone created equally - to live a pure life through thought, mind and action.

Sanskrit has well defined Himsa as doing harm or causing injury; But Putting "A" before "Himsa" (Violence), It becomes "Ahimsa

(Non-Violence)," the latter "A" just negates it. In a very simple sense, Ahimsa is abstaining from causing hurt, injury or harm to any living being. Common sense ethics dictates that one does not do to others what one does not want done to oneself. Our Vedic shastra says that "Ahimsa param\_dharmah (Noninjury is the foremost value). Patanjali describes that a human being must follow for physical and emotional wellbeing growth. Patanjali mentioned in his "Yama" (Self- Control) discipline that Ahimsa is the first value. Patanjali defined Ahimsa as not hurting or bearing malice to any being by means of speech, thoughts, or actions. Thus, noninjury is a universal value. It should be noted here that "Nonviolence" in English literature talks about a true only the most extreme forms of wrongdoing, whereas "Ahimsa" goes much deeper to prohibit even the subtle abuse and simple hurt. This thought or approach not only condemned killing, but extended to harm caused by one's thoughts, words, and deeds of all kinds.

#### HIMSA

All harsh and rude speech is Himsa. Violence committed even in a dream is also "Himsa", which goes against the principle of "Ahimsa". Use of servants, or inferiors are considered as "Himsa". Wounding the feeling of others by gesture, expression, tone of voice and unkind words is also Himsa.

To fail to relieve another's pain, or even to neglect to help is considered as a sort of Himsa.

Ahimsa, practiced in its purest form, is Divine in Nature. To me, Ahimsa and Divinity are one. You cannot have one without another one too. I believe that Ahimsa is positive, cosmic love. I think that it is the development of a mental attitude in which hatred for others is replaced by love. Ahimsa, being a true sacrifice, forgiveness; it is a Shakti (Power); and it is a true strength. To begin with, Ahimsa is a discipline and disciple.

#### DISCIPLINE OF AHIMSA

The Jain Community practiced daily the tenets of Ahimsa such that Jain Monks avoid eating after sunset to prevent ingesting tiny creatures present in the evening. The Monks even covered their mouths with pieces of cloth and swept the ground as they walked etc to avoid harming any living being. Similarly, the Hindu Monks take a vow of Ahimsa. Hindu Monks live a Saintly life sensitive to hurting another by thought, word, or deed. Thus, Ahimsa is for strong people who desire

Divinity In their respective lives. If you practice Ahimsa, then you should never entertain evil thoughts against anybody; never harbor Anger or any negative thoughts. The ultimate truth can be attained only through Ahimsa which is not possible without fearlessness. Ahimsa can only be practiced by brave and not by weak people. Ahimsa is a quality of the strong. It is a weapon of the strong and for the strong. Ahimsa is the perfection of Forgiveness. The Invisible hand of God gives protection as there is a hidden power in Ahimsa. The people who practice Ahimsa are blessed by Almighty God.

#### AHIMSA A UNIVERSAL VOW

Ahimsa is a "Great Vow" and should be practiced by all people of all Counties as it does not refer or concern only Hindus or Indians alone. Whoever wants to realize the Truth must practice Ahimsa. In fact, the power of Ahimsa has been increasingly recognized and accepted in the Western Countries. Both Dr. Martin Luther King of America and Nelson Mandela of South Africa were effectively influenced by the teaching and example of Mahatma Gandhi. Swami Vivekanand once said. "The Test of Ahimsa is the absence of jealousy. The man whose heart neve cherishes even the thought of injury to anyone that man is the Bhakta -a devotee of God, he is a yogi, and he is Guru of all. Swami Shivanand said, "No thought of revenge, hatred or ill

will should rise in our mind. Injuring others gives rise to hatred.

#### VEGETARIANISM

The value of Ahimsa on Vegetarianism is increasingly growing, especially in the West. It is natural to live with a minimum of hurt to other beings. In India, vegetarianism is based on this value. The Human Being is not in the same "Nocategory as other Choice" creatures (non-human) as these creatures do not choose what to have Lunch or Dinner. Whereas human beings with self-consciousness and free-will do have the choice to choose any food for Lunch or Dinner. The gift of free-will carries with it a responsibility to follow the Dharmic or Righteous norm for choice of one's food. Causing others non-injury to is Compassion. The Vedic Scripture says, " How can you practice true compassion who eats the flesh of an animal to fatten his/her own flesh?".

What does the Vedas say on Ahinsa?

 Dharma Shastras (Manu) says:

Nonviolence, Non-stealing, Purity, Sense Control, and Truthfulness are Dharma of all the four Varnas – four functional groups of an ideal society.

#### Mahabharat chapter 18 Shlok 113.8:

One should never do that to another, which one regards as

injurious to one's own self. This is the rule of Dharma Righteous.

• Mahabharat chapter 18 - Shlok 116.37- 41:

Ahimsa is the highest Dharma; Ahimsa is the best tapas; Ahimsa is the best gift;

Ahimsa is the highest self-control;

Ahimsa is highest sacrifice; Ahimsa is the highest power; Ahinsa is the highest friend; Ahimsa is the highest truth; Ahimsa is the highest teaching.

#### SHANDILYA UPANISHAD

Ahimsa is not causing pain to any living being at any time through the actions of one's mind, speech, or body.

God is with us; within us. Our God is only one who gives us the strength to work. We will surely experience Divinity in our life if we live with this inspiration in our heart. Our work will become our devotion and means of our spiritual progress. Putting God in the center of our personal, professional, and occupational endeavors will guide our all activities. Applying the principle of Dharma effectively and fruitfully will pursue our life's pursuits. When Dharma - Bhakti enters in the man's life, Man becomes Human. There is the basic difference in Indian mindset and Western mind-set with respect to the eternal journey of Soul as described in the teaching of Vedic Dharma.





### MEDITATE ON THE SEA OF ETERNITY

Meditation is the direct road leading to Self- realization. But, it is important that an aspirant has a clear understanding of what meditation is, and how it must be practiced.

Simply sitting in one pose does not constitute meditation. Meditation is not an escape into a dream world of fantasy. It is not a magical feat to bring aspirants out of pain and give them all the delights that they have always dreamed about. The simple truth is that meditation must change the very structure of the mind. Then, how can it be possible to linger on the old desires, concepts, fancies, and ideals of life?

Meditation is a direct way to change the patterns of the mind from the very depths of the unconscious. Unless a deeper reorientation is worked out in the planes of the unconscious, human life will continue to remain in its old rut: the same old talks, the same old friends, the same old concepts that increase the complexity of conditions and circumstances.

There are three stages in meditation. The first stage is that of one-pointed concentration. This is called dharana (concentration) in Sanskrit. The next stage is the continuity of the one-pointed flow of the mind. This is called dhyana (meditation) in a technical sense. The third stage is samadhi (super consciousness), when the mind begins to expand beyond the limits of the ego- center. It then begins to reflect the grandeur of universal harmony and beauty.

of the Bv practice concentration, meditation and samadhi, a Yogi ascends the ladder of Yoga and attains Selfrealization. In the beginning a sustained effort is needed to promote a concentrated mind. An aspirant must adopt a definite pose and practice meditation every day at a definite time, preferably early in the morning. He must follow a technique according to the instructions of his Guru. But, as meditation is perfected, a concentrated state of mind continues to alwavs operate. It does not depend upon a particular time and pose. Meditation becomes spontaneous.

A mind purified by meditation continues to gather higher impressions based on wisdom. These impressions continue to destroy impressions based upon and egoism illusion. The meditative process removes all the extraneous obstacles that hide your identity — the Self. When the mind is freed from egoistic complexes, it reveals that you are the immortal Self, you are the Non-dual Brahman or the Absolute.

It is important to remember that hallucinogenic drugs and drinks have nothing to do with meditation. The idea that mind is led to expansion through these drugs is based upon gross ignorance. Under the influence of drugs. the mental process disfigured and becomes so contracted that even the most insignificant objects seem to have a strange expansion. Further, these experiences lead to a personality that cannot face the realities of life. Individuals using drugs are generous in words and verbal idealism, but they are unable to bring their ideals into their practical life.

An aspirant must adopt a positive path under the guidance of a Guru. He must learn to integrate his personality in the light of Yoga philosophy. Meditation leads to the cessation of all sorrows, sufferings, and cycles of birth and death. It is through a process of positive integration that he can enter the stream of meditation that leads to the Sea of Eternity, which bestows endless bliss. May the Lord grant your patience and endurance to move forward on the path of Yoga, which culminates in union with the Divine Self.

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### THE WISDOM OF A PARROT

There was once a farmer in the Middle East who had a parrot for a pet. It so happened that this farmer had an opportunity to go to India. Before departing, he asked his daughters what they would like him to bring back as gifts. Each one of them had some idea of what she wanted— silken dresses, rare spices, and other luxurious things.

Then he asked the parrot what he would like, and he said, "Please find a flock of parrots there and give them a message. The message is 'How can I attain freedom?"

The farmer turned to the parrot and said, "You silly bird, you should forget about freedom. Aren't you happy inside the cage? I will give you food and water. I will also talk to you and give you a lot of attention. Why should you seek freedom? Nevertheless, for curiosity's sake, I will convey your message even though I already know the answer. Whatever it is, it's going to stay right there with you in the cage, because I'm not letting you go. I love you so much."

"All right," said the parrot, "Just convey my message and bring back the answer, whatever it might be. I have heard that the parrots in India are Sages and that they have profound wisdom and insight."

So, the farmer traveled to India and bought the things that his daughters had requested. Then suddenly, he remembered the parrot's message. Accordingly, he traveled by the banks of the Ganges River until, in a certain Himalayan valley, he found a group of parrots gathered. He approached them and called out, "I have a parrot in the Middle East, and he has given me a message to convey to you."

Many of the parrots flew away, but one of their leaders stayed there and listened to him. The farmer continued, "My parrot wants to know, 'How can I attain freedom?"

After hearing the message, the wise Indian parrot didn't say a word. He just turned stiff and cold and then fell dead. The man felt miserable. "Why did I come here to convey this unnecessary message?" he thought to himself.

Deeply regretful, he returned home, bringing back the things that his daughters had requested. And then his parrot, lifting its foot, asked him, "What about my message to the parrots? How did they answer the question?"

The farmer replied, "Don't ask me for the answer. It was the wrong thing to do. I shouldn't have done it, but still, I did it for your sake. I really regret it."

The parrot said, "Please tell me what happened." And the farmer answered, "I went there and told a flock of parrots that my parrot wanted to attain freedom. The other parrots flew away, but one of their leaders listened to me. Unfortunately, by the time I finished talking, it had fallen down dead, and then I left."

As he turned to his parrot, suddenly, much to his horror and amazement, that beloved bird too became cold and stiff and fell down dead.

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## HINDU PANCHĀNG

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A **panchāng** is a Hindu calendar and almanac, which follows traditional units of Hindu timekeeping, and presents important dates and their calculations in a tabulated form. Panchangas are used in Jyotisha or *Jyotişa* (Hindu astrology).

The basic purpose of Hindu Panchang is to check various Hindu festivals and auspicious time (Muhurta). In the Hindu system of muhurat, various element of Panchang constitute auspicious and inauspicious moments (Yogas) by combination of weekday-Tithi, weekdayconstellation. In addition, individual weekdays, Tithis, constellations, Yoga and Karanas have been prescribed for specific activities which fructify during their currency.

Panchāngas are published in India by many authors, societies, academies, and universities. Different publications differ only minutely. At least for a casual or not yet trained reader, this does not matter much. They forecast celestial phenomena such as solar eclipses, forecasting weather (rain, dry spells) as well as more mundane occurrences.

The study of Panchāng involves understanding Rasi phala (also pronounced 'Rashi phala') - the impact of the signs of the zodiac on the individual. Astrologers consult the Panchāng to set auspicious dates for weddings, for any family special activities, and other activities as per their religion. The casting of a Panchāng involves elaborate mathematical work involving high level of spherical geometry and sound understanding of astronomical phenomena, such as sidereal movements of heavenly bodies. However, in practice the tabulation is done on the basis of shortcut formulations as propounded by ancient Vedic sages and scholars.

A typical Panchāng may state tabulations of positions of Sun, Moon, and other planets for every day of the year on a fixed place (longitude, latitude) and time of day (in 24-hour format - Indian Standard Time). The users calculate the remaining data using their relative difference from this fixed place and time.

There are several panchāngas that contain information for more than one year. There is one,"*Vishvavijaya Panchāngam*" that covers 100 years.

In all Panchang, two traditions have been followed with respect to lunar months: the Amanta tradition, which ends the lunar month on a new moon day and the Purnimanta tradition, which ends the month on a full moon day. As a result, a Shukla paksha (from the new moon day to the full moon day) will always belong to the same month of Hindu Calendar in both traditions, whereas a Krishna paksha (from the full moon day to the new moon day) will always be associated with two succeeding months.

## 2024 FESTIVALS CALENDAR VIKRAM SAMVAT 2080 - 2081

#### January (Pausha – Magha 2080)

01	MON	NEW YEAR DAY
07	SUN	Saphala Ekadashi
08	MON	Pradosh
10	WED	Amavasya
12	FRI	Swami Vivekananda Jayanti
13	SAT	Lohri
14	SUN	Makar Sankranti
21	SUN	Putrada Ekadashi
22	MON	Pradosh
25	THU	Purnima
26	FRI	Indian Republic Day
30	TUE	Mahatma Gandhi Punyatithi

#### February (Magha – Falgun 2080)

05	MON	Shattila Ekadashi
07	WED	Pradosh
09	FRI	Amavasya
13	TUE	Vasant Panchami
13	TUE	Kumbha Sankranti
15	THU	Swami Dayanand Saraswati Jayanti
19	MON	Jaya Ekadashi
21	WED	Pradosh
23	FRI	Purnima
26	MON	Savarkar Punyatithi

#### March (Falgun – Chaitra 2080)

06	WED	Vijaya Ekadashi
07	THU	Pradosh
08	FRI	Maha Shivaratri
09	SAT	Amavasya
14	THU	Meena Sankranti
20	WED	Amalaki Ekadashi
22	FRI	Pradosh
24	SUN	Purnima - Holika Dahan
25	MON	HOLI



#### April (Chaitra - Vaishakh -2081)

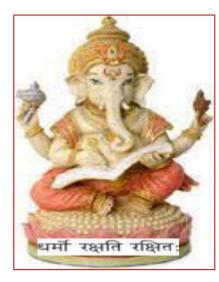
04	THU	PapMochani Ekadashi
06	SAT	Pradosh
08	MON	Amavasya
09	TUE	SAMVAT 2081 BEGINS
09	TUE	Gudi Padwa, Navratri Begins
13	THU	Baisakhi, Mesha Sankranti
16	TUE	Ram Navami, Navratri Ends
19	FRI	Kamada Ekadashi
20	SAT	Pradosh
21	SUN	Mahavir Jayanti
23	TUE	Purnima, Hanuman Jayanti

#### May (Vaishakh – Jyeshth 2081)

04	SAT	Varuthini Ekadashi
05	SUN	Pradosh
07	TUE	Amavasya
14	TUE	Vrishabha Sankranti
18	SAT	Mohini Ekadashi
20	MON	Pradosh
23	THU	Purnima - Buddha Jayanti

#### June (Jyeshth - Ashadh 2081)

02	SUN	Apara Ekadashi
03	MON	Pradosh
05	WED	Amavasya
17	MON	Nirjala Ekadashi
19	WED	Pradosh
21	FRI	Purnima



## 2024 FESTIVALS CALENDAR VIKRAM SAMVAT - 2081

#### July (Ashadh – Shravan 2081)

01 02	MON TUE	Yogini Ekadashi Pradosh
05	FRI	Amavasya
15	MON	Karka Ekadashi
17	WED	Devshayani Ekadashi
18	THU	Pradosh
21	SUN	Guru Vyasa Purnima
31	WED	Kamika Ekadashi
August (Shravan – Bhadrapad 2081)		

-	-	
01`	THU	Pradosh
03	SAT	Amavasya
07	WED	Hariyali Teej
15	THU	Putrada Ekadashi
15	THU	Indian Independence Day
17	SAT	Pradosh
19	MON	Purnima - Raksha Bandhan`
26	MON	Shri Krishna Janmashtami
29	THU	Aja Ekadashi
30	FRI	Prudish

#### September (Bhadrapad - Ashwin 2081)

02	MON	Amavasya
07	SAT	Shri Ganesh Chaturthi
14	SAT	Parsva Ekadashi
15	SUN	Pradosh
16	MON	Kanya Sankranti
17	TUE	Purnima
18	WED	Sharadh Begins
27	FRI	Indira Ekadashi
29	SUN	Pradosh



#### October (Ashwin - Kartik 2081)

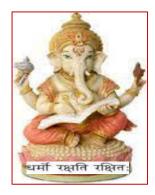
01	TUE	Amavasya, Sharadh Ends
02	WED	Mahatma Gandhi Jayanti
03	THU	Navartri Begins
10	THU	Durga Ashtami
11	FRI	Navratri Ends
12	SAT	Dussehra
13	SUN	Papankusha Ekadashi
14	MON	Pradesh
16	WED	Purnima
20	SUN	Karva Chauith
27	SUN	Rama Ekadashi
29	TUE	Pradosh, Dhanteras
31	THU	Diwali, Lakshmi Pooja

#### November (Kartik - Margashirsha 2081)

02	SAT	Bhaiya Dooj
12	TUE	Devutthana Ekadashi
13	WED	Pradosh:
15	FRI	Purnima
26	TUE	Utpanna Ekadashi
28	THU	Pradosh
30	SAT	Amavasya

#### December (Margashirsha – Paush 2081)

11	WED	Mokshada Ekadashi
12	THU	Pradosh
14	SAT	Purnima
15	SUN	Dhanu Sankranti
25	MON	Pt. Madan Mohan Malviya Jayanti
26	THU	Saphala Ekadashi
27	FRI	Pradosh
30	MON	Amavasya
31	TUE	NEW YEAR EVE











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- Maintains a Panel of Speakers on Hindu Dharma related topics.
- Participates in appropriate cultural and dharmic exhibits and shows.
- Provides support to other like-minded organizations.
- In the spirit of "Vasudaiva kutumbkum", the Foundation runs a sewa (service) program, often in collaboration with other sister organizations.

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## SHRI GANESH

Dr. Dileep and Dr. Kokila Vyas

Growing up, most of us heard the story of Shri Ganesha's first encounter with his Father, Lord Shiva. It so happened that Lord Shiva had gone away for a long penance. In his absence, Mother Parvati delivered a baby boy, later known as Ganesha. After a few years, one day, Mother Parvati was taking a bath and asked Ganesha to guard the house to prevent unexpected intruders while she was taking a bath. By luck, Lord Shiva returned home from his long penance. Ganesha and Shiva, the Son and the Father, did not know each other; hence Ganesha would not allow Lord Shiva to enter the house. Ganesha was the Son of Mata Shakti and was very robust. A fight ensued. Lord Shiva Chopped off Ganesha's head and entered the house. When Parvati learned about the battle and the result, she was distraught and explained to Lord Shiva that he had killed his Son. She begged Shiva to rectify the situation.

Even long before this incident, there lived an elephant demon/ Asura named Gajasura. By long penance, he had pleased Lord Shiva and obtained a boon to be always close to him. In granting this boon, Lord Shiva had entered Gajasura's belly. Lord Vishnu and Brahmaji, among others, were not happy to lose Shiva's presence. They sought guidance from Lord Vishnu for a solution. Together they approached Nandi, dressed him nicely, and performed in a magnificent show with other cast

members. One day Gajasura came to see the show and was highly pleased. He wanted to reward the group and asked them what they desired. Lord Vishnu, disguised as one of the group members, indicated they wished to have what Gajasura had in his belly, namely Lord Shiva. Gajasura immediately recognized that this was not any ordinary performer but Lord Vishnu himself. Having once pleased Lord Shiva, Gajasura would not lose the rare opportunity to please Lord Vishnu. He agreed. Lord Vishnu took advantage of Nandi's strength and asked him to tear open the belly of Gajasura using his pointed horns. As a result, Shiva became free from Gajasura's body. Lord Shiva, however, had promised Gajasura to always be with him, so he kept Gajasura's head with him.

Lord Shiva transplanted Gajasura's head onto Ganeshas's body, bringing him back to life. Now Ganesha being his Son, is always close to him, so he kept the promise he had given to Gajasura and brought life to Ganesha. Parvati was pleased with the revival of her Son and securing a commitment from Shiva that anyone performing any religious ceremony would invoke Lord Ganesha first. One common reason why the invocation of Ganesha precedes any religious tradition.

But there is another philosophical reason with profound implications. According to Hindu Philosophy, the

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primordial Spirit, or the primordial knowledge, united with the primordial energy and formed the basis for creating the universe. The creator never left the creation; therefore, they are not separate entities. In short, their product is a manifestation of the creator or the primordial Spirit. One of the first creations of this union was 'Jeeva.

Lord Shiva and Parvati personify the primordial spirit and primordial energy. They are the Adi Dampati or the first couple, and their first creation was Ganesha-the personification of Jeeva. An element of Primordial knowledge or the Spirit resides in every living and nonliving entity in the universe. In living beings, it is the Jeeva. In Yoga Sastra, it is the Muladhara chakra in our body. So when we worship Ganesha, we worship Jeeva.

Before the incident of the battle with his Father, Ganesha was only Prakriti's product and did not have an element of primordial Spirit or knowledge, but now he is complete. Lord Shiva gave him the head, and Parvati provided the body. Having the face of Gajasura, the elephant demon, he also acquired a new name, 'Gajanana.'

Now let us look at Ganesha, Ganapati, and a few other names that begin with 'Gana.' Ganesha is Gana+ Isha. Gana is a word for a group or a class, and Isha means the Lord. So, Ganesha is the Lord of a large group or a class. Now, who is the leader in our body? Is it your mind? A mind is a tool. It helps our sense organs and organs of action and defines our identity. These are groups. Who is the Lord of these groups? It is Jeeva. We already said that Ganesha is the personification of Jeeva and that Jeeva is an individualized soul. So, if we look at every living being, animals and plants included, there are billions of individualized souls or Jeevamany groups of Jeeva. Who is the Lord of all these groups? It is Ganesha. A very common and famous Sanskrit shloka for Ganpati says:

> ॐ गणानां त्वा गणपतिं हवामहे कविं कवीनामुपमश्रवस्तमम्। ज्येष्ठराजं ब्ह्मणाम् ब्रह्मणस्पत ॐ महागणाधिपतये नमः॥

Ganhanam tva Ganhapatim (Gum) havamahe kavim kaveenaam upama-shravastamam Jyeshta raajam Brahmanhaam Brahmanhaspata IMahaganha Adhipataye Namah!

#### Meaning:

Om, Ganapati, you the Lord of groups (Ganas-pleural), we offer our sacrificial oblation (Havamahe) to you. Among the wise man, you're their wisdom, and you are their glory. Among the Lords, you are the eldest; among the divine bodies, you are Brahman itself. Please listen to our prayers, sit at the altar of the sacrificial fire, and glorify it.

Om, I bow to a great lord of groups of Jeeva.

Gist: Among the groups, you are the leader or the Lord. So, Ganapati, Ganesha, and Jeeva are the Lord or the leader of groups of things in our body and all the universe's souls. So, worshiping Ganesha is worshiping Jeeva and acknowledging who we are. Knowing who we are, i.e., is a big step towards liberation. Since creator and creation are not separate, we also honor the creator. Hava Mahai means offering my Ahamego as oblation in the sacred fire.

Why is he called the remover of all obstacles in our lives? If we look at ourselves, we do not identify ourselves as Jeeva. But we identify ourselves with attributes such as names, ethnicity, profession, etc. Would there be any conflict or obstacle if we identify ourselves as Jeeva and see all others as

#### CONT. from Page 12

The man started beating his head and ripping his clothes, but he couldn't do anything more. He opened the door of the cage, brought the parrot out, and started grieving over it. Then he thought about how he was going to dispose of the body.

Amazingly though, the minute the man turned away, the parrot began to flutter his wings and flew up to top of the roof. From there he said to his master, "I understood the message that the Indian parrot gave to you. The secret of freedom lies in dying. The moment I adopted that secret, you let me go. You had no choice."

The moral of this mystic story is that the soul is as if in prison and the ego keeps it locked up. Prison implies a life that is confined to the mind and senses and guided by the ego. In Vedanta philosophy, it is called Jiva Shrishti. Every individual has adopted values and concepts that are based upon his conditioned mind. Such a world is like a cage. From morning to night, the mind is trying to obey the concerns of Jeeva or the same as ourselves? If we give up our false identity with our body and attributes and submit that identity, ego, or Aham as an oblation in the sacred fire, we will have no obstacles and live in peace.

About the author: Dr. Dileep Vyas is a Pediatrician, Pediatric hematologist - Oncologist, and Pediatric Emergency Medicine specialist. Dr. Kokila Vyas is an Anatomical and Clinical Pathologist and Nuclear Medicine Specialist They both are retired now and inspired and educated about Hindu Dharma .by Dr. Prayaga Sastry, MD (Texas)

the ego. There is constant thought about the memories of the past and the expectations for the future.

During all these worries and expectations, there is no possibility for a person to commune with universal life, even though that is the essence of one's soul. The soul does not belong to this prison world. The real world is the world of freedom.

How then, does one attain freedom? The secret lies in dying to your egoistic life and to the values that are based on the mind and senses. It lies in dying to Jiva Shrishti—the creation you have evolved because of egoistic vision. You must understand that this death is a subtle, mystical transformation.

In practice, what this implies is to allow your intellect to be above attachment and hatred and above praise and censure, as if you were dead to this world.

Courtesy: International Yoga Guide

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## SPIRITUALITY IS CONNECTED TO LIFE

Swami Bhoomananda

The insight Krishna instilled and the instruction he gave on the basis of the immortal Self and its direct knowledge, are both sufficiently in line with secular and social considerations as well. There is no disharmony between the two. Rather, the episode reveals how comprehensive and inclusive is Krishna's Universal message!

Krishna now presents 7 verses, 2.31 to 2.37, setting forth an assortment of facts and compulsions, all of which equally point to the indispensable need for fighting the war. He makes it clear that spirituality and its compulsions are not in variance with secular needs, facts, and findings. Any seeming difference in the matter is only superficial, not substantial.

One's own duty should never be abandoned.

Krishna first points out that svadharma (One's own duty/responsibilities), dharma of the kshatriya (fighter) is to fight whenever it becomes necessary. All that the fighter must make sure is that he fights for the righteous cause, upholding the ethics and wellbeing of the society. There should be no slip or disregard in this. If this is ensured, then the war becomes noble and rewarding for the Kshatriya (2.31).

In the next verse (2.32), Krishna proclaims that only fortunate fighters get the opportunity, occasion, to fight a war of this kind. War is always between two sets of fighters. Each set has its own views and goals. Both will never be right; both will never be wrong, either. If the stand and objective of one side are right, righteous, holy, and benevolent, those of the other will necessarily be just the opposite - wrong, unrighteous, unholy and maleficent. "Call it an unsolicited blessing or favors; your case, Arjuna, is righteous."

"That is why", says Krishna, "this war came to take place in Kurukshetra, which is a Dharmakshetra. This place, this field, is noted for Dharma, righteousness. Your ancestor, Kuru, had done long austerity here. From then on, this place came to be known as Dharma-kshetra, the abode of dharma. This will at every step, support, strengthen and enhance the dharmic spirit and fervor of the righteous fighters. At the same time, it will also thwart the unrighteous."

Mahabharata war was righteous for Arjuna and his brothers, but unrighteous for Duryodhana and his allies. This difference was evident right from the beginning. Sanjaya was describing to the blind king Dhritarashtra the events that took place in Kurukshetra in their due order. The king wanted him to describe what ensued right from the beginning. Impudence of the unrighteous

Sanjaya reported: "Both armies came to the battlefield. The first to arrive was Duryodhana and his larger team, more than one and a half times Yudhishthira's. Yet fear and doubt haunted Duryodhana right from the start.

"Both the armies got arrayed in the battlefield. Identification marks were allocated to both. Then they signed a memorandum of understanding governing the rules of war. Thus, everything was set and the battle was to begin. What happened next was intriguing. Duryodhana straight went to his teacher, ignoring Bheeshma, his commander-in-chief. That was the first note of disrespect and disorder he wantonly displayed. He began to speak authoritatively, disregarding humility, violating all norms of disciple-Teacher relationship. Should he have listened to the Teacher, or should he instruct the Teacher? See, how the sacred influence of Kurukshetra was working to misdirect the vicious!

"Duryodhana first described to the Teacher, how strong the Pandavas army was along with its leading fighters. He caustically pointed out that Dhrishtadyumna was commanding Yudhisthira's army. It was well known that Providence had intended Dhrishtadyumna be born to King Drupada for killing Drona. But was it the right occasion for Duryodhana to hint on that? What a cruel pointer! He also admitted that the greater many, who had assembled to support him were virtually those "who had forsaken their life for his sake".

What a self-defeating thought! He was closing up haughtily, reminding the teacher that all he wanted him (the teacher) to do was only to protect Bheeshma, who was commanding his army. As long as the grandfather was alive and active, Duryodhana had no fear of defeat at all. Could there be a graver humiliation for Drona, the warring skill imparted by whom was alone the strength and defence of Duryodhana as well as his opponents! How subtly Dharmakshetra exerts its influence defiling Duryodhana's moves and strengthening Pandavas!

Can you imagine what happened next? Bheeshma was not able to bear Duryodhana's insolence. Intending to arrest Duryodhana's impudent speech, he raised a lion's roar and blew his conch marking the commencement of war cries. It terminated Duryodhana's impertinence.

Following Bheeshma, the entire camp raised all kinds of sounds, a tumultuous cacophony, spewing havoc, and disorderliness. But it had no effect on the opposite army at all.

#### SERENITY OF THE RIGHTEOUS

Krishna was happy that what he was insisting upon all along, transpired. He did not want Yudhishthira to initiate the war by any means. He longed to ensure that Duryodhana took the first step of precipitating the war. When Bheeshma blew his conch, Krishna's objective was fulfilled.

It was now the turn of Yudhishthira's army to respond to Bheeshma's call. Dhrishtadyumna, the commander-in-chief, kept quiet. Aware of the greatness of Bheeshma, he knew he was no match to reciprocate the great invincible Pitamaha! There followed a grave suspense in the otherwise vibrant Kurukshetra!

Krishna, before agreeing to support Partha's side during the war, had avowed: "I will not take up any weapon nor will I fight directly in the war." But that did not prevent him from blowing his conch, Panchajanya, resolving the impasse. And what followed?

Arjuna blew his conch; then Bheema blew his; and Yudhishthira his. The other brothers and the rest followed too. Sanjaya subtly indicates that Yudhishthira's army was orderly; it did not raise any pandemonium or chaotic racket. Of course, the impact was conspicuously immense. Sanjaya notes: "It rents asunder the hearts and minds of the entire Duryodhana army".

#### UNIVERSAL RELEVANCE OF THE MESSAGE

When Krishna declares only the fortunate Kshatriyas will have the occasion to fight such a war, it means a great deal. Arjuna should shun all ideas of unrighteousness about the war, no matter whom he had to encounter and what relationship he had with them - whether it was the loving grandfather or adorable Teacher. Arjuna should have no hesitation in employing adequate defense and offence to vanguish the malicious forces.

The important point to note is that the insight Krishna instilled and the instruction he gave on the basis of the immortal Self and its direct knowledge, are both sufficiently in line with secular and social considerations as well. There is no disharmony between the two. Rather, the episode reveals how comprehensive and inclusive is Krishna's Universal message!

For Arjuna and his brothers, the war was wholesomely righteous and Dharmakshetra was bound to lead Yudhishthira to victory. Krishna points out that the war was not a choice of Pandavas. It was just inevitable and brought by chance. In it there was no place for any ill-conceived intention on the part of Yudhishthira, who always wanted to avoid bloodshed and made ample sacrifices for that. On this note, Krishna added that the war was an open door to heaven. What more did Arjuna need to redress his grief, eliminate his fear and reinforce his resolve?

#### IRREFUTABLE WHOLESOME INSTRUCTION

Krishna does not stop at that. He continues to provide further reasons for going ahead with the battle. Thus, in the next verse (2.33), he makes it clear, nay warns Arjuna, as to what will happen if he retreats from war. Krishna's words are clear, bold and powerful: "If you fail to respond to Duryodhana and Bheeshma, know for certain, you will be abandoning dharma as well as fame, thereby falling a victim to grave sin."

Any instruction to become effective should present its positive as well as negative sides. By warring, Arjuna would get the most laudable reward. But by not

fighting, he would incur a huge sin as well as ill fame. Both outcomes are equally consequential. Krishna's instruction becomes wholesome and its adherence irrefutable. This is the way any dilemma should be tackled, making the resolve acceptable in full.

In the next verse (2.34) Krishna further points to the consequence of abandoning war: "The moment you exit from the battlefield, many will start imputing various motives and bringing ill fame to you.

"Dear Arjuna, know well that for a person of repute, such ill fame is worse than death. In death, one becomes senseless, and will not have to hear or see anything; but, while living the ears are sharp. Having to listen to demeaning remarks from unworthy people will be an unbearable torment. Remember this."

Do not miss the relevance. Krishna first exposed the indestructible nature of the 'I', the Self. On that basis, he clearly said that the Soul will neither kill nor get killed. None, hence, is guilty. "Therefore, Arjuna, you fight. Do not relent or retreat."

After having said so, he assures Arjuna that not merely on the ground of the Self, but also on the basis of sober, secular considerations, the fight is righteous and esteemed. By presenting such complementary thoughts, Krishna makes his instruction absolute, unassailable, and wholesome. Do not fail to grasp the dexterity and elegance of Krishna's exposition.

#### HEEDING SOCIETAL RESPONSE

In the next two verses (2.35 and 2.36) he forewarns Arjuna: "There will be adverse thoughts and remarks of not merely those who do not like you, but also of Maharathis - renowned warriors. They will wonder: Has not Arjuna run away from the battlefield, out of fear? Remember: All of them now have great esteem for you. But the moment you relent and depart, the whole picture will change. There will be widespread condemnation.

"Those who do not like you will start speaking contemptuously about your skill and valor. Can there be anything more humiliating and tormenting? Think well, do not fail to see the dark side of your action."

#### A MOTHER BEHEST

Now we go to the next verse (2.37). Krishna briefly summarizes the net effect of all he said about the facts and compulsions of practical life: "Arjuna, these are the possibilities. This is where you stand. If you fight the war and die, you will attain heaven. If you win, you will enjoy the bounteous kingdom. Therefore, O son of Kunti, get up, resolving to fight. There is no other choice before you."

Why did Krishna address Arjuna as 'son of Kunti'? Kunti, the mother, had sent her timely message through Krishna to her sons. She categorically summoned: "Tell my son Dhananjaya (Arjuna) and Vrikodara (Bheema), these words: The time has come to fulfill the purpose for which a Kshatriya woman delivers sons."

What a stern call, reminder, from one's own mother! In fulfilling the role of a warrior, nothing should deter. This is how a genuine mother thinks and feels. What an amazing dharmic adherence, compulsion! In all relationships, the underscoring factor is the undeniable place and purpose of dharma!

Kuntidevi used the words Dhananjaya for Arjuna and Vrikodara for Bheema. By this, she was reminding Arjuna about his fame as a fighter, noted for conquering kingdoms and gaining their wealth. That he should be true to his fame and valor is the import of Kunti's message!

Vrikodara is one who eats like a glutton. Bheema was given to gluttonous consumption. What was his mighty stout body? He should 'justify his salt', and fight when the time for it has arrived. He cannot think of relenting and escaping challenges.

Krishna was giving a timely reminder to his friend about what his mother Kunti had specifically said and wished for heartily: the time had come to fulfil the very mission of a Kshatriya. Arjuna should not foster the least doubt or resistance in fighting the war.

Krishna pertinently hints: "What besides your mother's mandate, do you look forward to, in going ahead with the war, to take up the mission you have come to Kurukshetra driven by me for? Even the horses would be asking you to fight, if they had the power of speech!"

#### SPIRITUALITY IS CONNECTED TO LIFE

The point studious seekers and students of Bhagavad Gita should specially remember is that true spiritual wisdom as well as the instructions on its basis, is not detached from the facts and truths of our life and its purpose. The entire spirituality is so rational and logical that it is corroborated by all secular considerations and conclusions. In other words. spirituality as a science and direct experience is in full harmony with one's life and seeking to fulfil his ultimate needs and compulsions.

Courtesy: www.Bhoomananda.org.

We cannot create compartments in life -political, economic, social, environmental. Whatever we do or don't do affects and touches wholeness, the homogeneity. We are forever organically related to wholeness 3Ö

# IS HINDUISM A RELIGION OR A WAY OF LIFE?

Maria Wirth

It is often said, Hinduism is not a religion but a way of life. Or is it a religion?

#### What is true?

It depends on how religion is defined. Most people probably would say that religion is:

- about believing in an invisible Supreme Being, which is the cause of our existence,
- about methods and rituals to worship it,
- about living according to its laws or will.

In this case, Hinduism is definitely a religion. In fact, it is the Mother of all religions, because the Indian Vedas had postulated already in very ancient times the existence of such a Supreme Being. They called it Brahman (from big) or Paramatma or Paramashiva or simply Tat (That) and declared that it cannot be imagined by the human mind. Nevertheless, a kind of description is given: "Sat-Chit-Ananda" (it means, it is Truth, Knowledge and Bliss). It is allpervading and therefore the Essence (Latin: esse = to be) of everything, including us. So why does the question arise whether Hinduism is a religion?

To discover this, we need to look at those religions where nobody has a doubt

that these are religions. The term 'religion' was first used for the Catholic Church and later for Islam, too, and nobody has a doubt that these two are the main religions in today's world.

These two religions also are about the 3 points I mentioned above. Yet there are significant differences.

The Supreme Being (called God or Allah respectively) of these 2 religions is not the essence in all but is a separate entity which has certain personal traits. One most important trait is that it is jealous of other gods and wants the whole of humanity to worship only Him (yes, the Supreme is clearly imagined as male). Both religions give out a dire warning: those who do not accept this truth will burn eternally in hell.

How do these religions know that this is the truth? Because they claim that the Supreme Being himself has revealed this truth to one person (in the case of Christianity to Jesus Christ some 2000 years ago and in the case of Islam to Prophet Mohammed some 1400 years ago).

Here is where another definition of religion comes in. It is often said that religion is a "belief-system". It needs blind, unverifiable belief in what the 'founder' of the religion has said, and which is written down in a book.



Here Hinduism is clearly not a religion. Hinduism does not require blind belief. On the contrary, an open enquiry and an inner exploration into the truth, especially into the truth of one's own being, is necessary to discover the divine Essence in oneself; to discover that Atman (one's own consciousness) is indeed Brahman, as the Vedas proclaim. So, is Hinduism not a religion?

Let's look at the word meaning of religion. Religare (Latin) means to bind. Bind to whom or to what?

Does it mean to bind to the Supreme Being or does it mean to bind to the doctrine?

If we look at history, the Church (for which the term religion was first used) was very adamant that those followers which it had gained through (often forced) baptism must never leave the Church. Christianity had strict blasphemy, even has today. So, it can be safely assumed that religion meant to bind its followers to the doctrine of the respective religion. The followers must 'religiously' stick to the doctrine.

If it would have meant to be bound to the Supreme Being, then surely Christianity or Islam should not have any objection if the Supreme is called by another name, for example Shiva, and the process of being bound to Him 'Yoga'.

So strictly speaking, Hinduism is not a religion.

But it is also not just a way of life. It has many rules on how to live life in an ideal way.

So, one could say, Hinduism is an ideal way of life which is helpful in realizing one's ONENESS with the Supreme Being.

This ideal way of life is not based on a dogmatic belief system, but on experiential wisdom.

## DISCRIMINATIVE INTELLECT

In the process of Pursuing Discriminative Intellect - "Vivek Buddhi", it is natural to exercise your best judgment and if you later recognize that you had made a mistake; you must realize that life is not lived with mathematical precision. In other words, in any situation, the mistakes you make are needed for your evolution. So, you must experience the "THORNY" situation in life in order to remove all that is toxic in your personality.

3Ö

### HINDU CALENDAR 2024 (VIKRAM SAMVAT 2080)

	January - 2024 (Pausha – Magh)		February - 2024 (Magh – Falgun)				March - 2024 (Falgun – Chaitra)	
01	MON	New Year Day	05	MON	Shattila Ekadashi	06	WED	Vijaya Ekadashi
07	SUN	Saphala Ekadashi	07	WED	Pradosh	07	THU	Pradosh
08	MON	Pradosh	09	FRI	Amavasya	08	FRI	Maha Shivaratri
10	WED	Amavasya	13	TUE	Vasant Panchami	09	SAT	Amavasya
12	FRI	Swami Vivekananda	13	TUE	Kumbha Sankranti	14	THU	Meena Sankranti
		Jayanti	15	THU	Swami Dayanand	20	WED	Amalaki Ekadashi
13	SAT	Lohri			Jayanti	22	FRI	Pradosh
14	SUN	Makar Sankranti	19	MON	Jaya Ekadashi	24	SUN	Purnima - Holika
21	SUN	Putrada Ekadashi	21	WED	Pradosh			Dahan
22	MON	Pradosh	23	FRI	Purnima	25	MON	HOLI
25	THU	Purnima	26	MON	Savarkar Punyatithi			*
26	FRI	Indian Republic Day					-	St.
30	TUE	Mahatma Gandhi Punyatithi						



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• Thursdays: Discourse on Bhagavad Geeta - 8 to 9:30 PM

Tea Break - 8:45 to 9 AM ♦ Upanishads – 9 to 10 AM

- Saturdays: Guided Meditation : 8 to 8:45 AM;
- Sundays: Discourse on Bhagavad Geeta 10 to 11:30 AM (At the West Springfield High School,6100 Rolling Road, Springfield, Virginia 22152)

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For additional information, please call 703-759-3954 or email: bpoudel@cox.net

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**Address Correction Requested** 

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