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Practise Dharma! [Dharma Vahini]

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Chapter VI

Practise *Dharma*!

The principles of *dharma* will not change to suit the convenience of people. *Dharma* is immutable. *Dharma* persists as *dharma* then, now, and forever. Of course, the practices and rules of applied *dharma* might change according to changing causes; but even then, the practices have to be tested on the basis of the scriptures (*sastras*), not on the basis of advantage. There should be no such calculation. The scriptures may not always support rules that yield tangible visible advantage, nor can the *Vedas* etc. be expected to indicate only such acts. *Dharma* cannot be tested on those lines; direct or ocular proof is impossible. The *Mimamsakas* state that *dharma* can be known only through the *Vedic mantras* and that the *Vedas* attempt to elucidate only truths that are beyond ocular demonstration.

If *dharma* is followed with an eye on the consequences, it might even be neglected when the advantage is not patent

or immediate. Everyone will not have the same motive or the same standard. For example, each will have a different idea of the fruits of bathing, morning and evening prayers, repetition of the name, and meditation, which are prescribed. Some people cancel repeating the *Gayatri* in the evenings and instead recite the thousand names (*sahasranama*) of Siva or Vishnu. "Perform morning and evening prayers (*sandhyavandana*) at the proper time (*kaale sandhyaa samaachareth*); that is the prescription." But, in spite of such directions, is it not a breach of *dharma* to cancel the evening prayers like this? Similarly there are prescriptions for every caste.

> I created the four castes (*varnas*), dividing them on the basis of quality and activities.
>
> (*Chaathurvarnyam mayaa shrishtham guna karma Vibhaagashah*)

says the *Gita.* The meaning is quite clear; that is the teaching. But, relying on all kinds of paltry arguments and dry reasonings, many follow the *dharma* that appeals to them and, without any fear of God or sin, also drag the innocent and ignorant onto the wrong path.

The protection of *dharma*

The Lord comes down now and then to uplift the downtrodden and to reestablish *dharma.* This is the reason for the incarnation of the Lord, as has been said in ringing tones in the *Gita*.

> I create myself for the establishment of *dharma* in every age.
>
> *Dharma samsthapanaarthaaya sambhavaami yuge yuge.*

Here, one point has to be clearly grasped. Many who read the *Gita* take it that the Lord incarnates when *dharma* is destroyed and when the forces of *a-dharma* begin to prevail. But there is no basis to draw the conclusion that *dharma* gets destroyed. The *Gita* does not say so. The word used is *diminish (glaani*); that is to say, when the indications are that *dharma* is in danger, "I will come in order to protect *dharma* from harm." He did not say that He will come down to protect it and preserve it after *dharma* has been destroyed! Of what use is a doctor after life has left? So too, after *dharma*, the very life-breath of humanity, has been destroyed, what is the need for the incarnation of the Lord (*Bhavarogavaidya*)? What is the Lord to protect? This is why the word decline is used to indicate not the destruction but the decline and weakening of *dharma.* The protection of *dharma* is the task of the Lord, for *dharma* is the very breath of the soul (*jivi*).

Falling into *a-dharma*

Dharma is not an ordinary affair. One who does not practise *dharma* is as bad as dead; one who practises it is of the divine nature. Now, there is need to turn people on to the *dharmic* path by means of the traditional methods of

good advice, tempting them with the attractive consequences of following the path, threatening to dissociate from those who do not, and inflicting punishment as a last resort (traditional methods of *sama*, *dhaana*, *bheda*, and *danda*). In ancient times, people never gave up the practice of *dharma*, even when threatened with death at the point of the sword. Now, without even the slightest pressure from others, people slide down and fall into *a-dharma.* Indeed, *dharma* is interpreted in various confusing ways, and those who strictly follow the real *dharma* are obstructed, laughed at, and treated as worse than dried-up grass. Those who anxiously adhere to *dharma* are branded as cheats, hypocrites, and ignoramuses. Such calumnators do not know what *dharma* is or what its principles are. Unfortunate individuals! They have no capacity to grasp the meaning of that word.

You can judge for yourself how *dharma* can be understood by people who do not know even the literal meaning of the word. What can people born blind know of the sun or its rays? Of course, they can feel the heat when the rays of the sun fall on their bodies, but they can't have an idea of the nature of sun, its form, its shape, its brilliance, etc. So too, for a person who has no conception of *dharma*, who has no faith in *dharma*, the joy derived by its observance is incomprehensible. To dilate on *dharma* before such people is as useless a venture as blowing a conch before people who are stone-deaf. They can only see the conch at the lips of the person blowing it, but they can't hear the least

bit of sound. So, when *dharma* is taught to people or extolled, care must be taken to see that they have the faith, earnestness, and eagerness to practise it. Only such must be handled and sought to be corrected. Later, by the promptings of their own experience and the joy they derive therefrom, even the ignorant will plant the seedlings of *dharma* in their hearts.

Nowadays, many educated persons immersed in *Vedic* and scriptural (*sastric*) knowledge and classic scholarship have lost faith in the texts of which they are masters. They have become afraid to stick firmly to *dharma*, for it is laughed at by their cynical friends, They have yielded to the crooked arguments of critics and sold their heritage for trivial returns. They interpret the fast on the eleventh day of the lunar month (*Ekadasi*) as one of the means for regulating health, the waving of the camphor flame as a remedy for asthmatics, breathing exercises (*pranayama*) as helping digestion, pilgrimages as educational tours, and charity as a means of self-advertisement, thus demeaning and desecrating the holy injunctions of *dharma.*

Such people only deceive the world; they are barbarians who do not know or heed the principles of *dharma.* They can learn something from a perusal of Manu's text on *dharma*.

> Anyone who wants to know *dharma* can know it only by following a system of logic (*tarka*) that is not opposed to *Veda* and the scriptures.

Aarsham dharmopadhesham cha
Vedashaasthra a-virodhina
Yastharkena anusandhaththe
Sa dharmam veda, netarah

Thus said Manu: No conclusion opposed to *Veda* can be logical. Dry logic is profitless, and Manu does not recommend it to those who want to study the *Vedas*, etc. Still, many today stick to this logical reasoning and follow *adharma* themselves, dragging others with them into the wrong path. That is why Veda Vyasa declared long ago:

> Those who follow the path of causalism and logic, seeking cause-and-effect connection, will not offer sacrifices in the sacred fire but will involve themselves in low demeaning acts.

Na yakshanthi, na hoshyanthi, hethuvadha vimohithah
Neechakarma karishyanthi, hethuvadha vimohithah

Veda Vyasa said this in *Aranyaparva* of the *Mahabharatha*, while describing the conditions that are to be expected in this age (the *kali-yuga*).

Follow *dharma*, as do the elements

Only by following the path of *dharma* or rectitude do the sun and moon revolve unerringly in their orbits. Only the

call of *dharma* makes all divine powers adhere to their various duties and responsibilities. Only *dharma* keeps the five elements bound to the principles of their nature.

You should derive the greatest possible benefit from *dharma* and, while following it, avoid causing any injury to yourselves or others. You must spread the glory of *dharma* by making yourself a shining example of the peace and joy it gives. Do not follow the trail of dry logic; do not confuse your brain by cynicism and prejudice; do not get interested in what others do or believe in and try to reform them or correct their footsteps. Have faith in the basic *Atma*, which is your real truth; test all lines of conduct on that basis, whether it will hinder the process of revealing the *Atma* or not. In the light of that faith and that test, carry on your daily duties and rites. Then, you will never fall into error. You will also derive great joy.

There are worldly maxims like "being engaged in a profession is the sign of a human (*udyogam purushalakshanam*)", or "being engaged in a task is the sign of a human (*karmam purushalakshanam*)." But the real maxim is "Observance of *dharma* is the sign of a human (*dharmam purushalakshanam*)". Everyone must engage in tasks infused with *dharma*, while putting into action the four goals of human life (*purusha-arthas*): *dharma*, wealth (*artha*), desire (*kama*), and liberation (*moksha*).

Dharma for men

Just as faithfulness to the husband (*pathivratha-dharma*) is for women, celibacy (*brahma-charya*) is for men. Just as woman should consider one person and one person only as her master and husband, man too has to be faithful to one woman and one woman only, as his mate, his wife. She has to consider the husband as God and worship him and minister to and follow his desires for the fulfilment of her duty of loyalty to the husband (*pathivratha*); so too, man should honour his wife as the "mistress of the home" and act in accordance with her wishes, for she is the Lakshmi of the home (*Grihalakshmi*). Then only can he deserve the status of "man".

Name and fame, honour and dishonour, vice and wickedness, good and bad are all equal and uniform for both men and women. There is no such thing as woman alone being bound and men being free; both are equally bound by the rules of *dharma.* Both will fall into *a-dharma* if they behave without consideration of the claims of the four pairs of attributes mentioned above. Men are bound in certain matters, just as women are; men have no right to do certain things. There are some important pledges between the husband and the wife.