



Dharmo rakṣati rakṣitaḥ **Dharma protects those who protect Dharma**

The Sanskrit word Dharma may take on many meanings depending on context. Dharma may best be understood to mean 'those actions, when followed, which will sustain ecologically and harmoniously at all levels'. To 'stand in Dharma' means to choose to act in accordance with all Vedic and Universal values; for example, the value of ahiṃsā (ahiṃsā paramo dharmah); the primary, exalted value being the avoidance of any form of violence (because, as Humans, we have habitual tendencies to act out violently). If one follows the value of ahiṃsā from moment to moment, reading the context and adjusting to it, mindfully practicing 'avoidance of violence', one is 'standing in Dharma'. It is important for a spiritual seeker to understand that by fully embracing Dharma, one is taking on a life-long prayerful commitment or vow (vṛtam) not only to ahiṃsā but to all Vedic and universal values.

What is Dharma?

The word dharma is derived from the root, dhr, as in dhārane, which means to sustain or to uphold. By definition, 'dharati iti dharmah', or, that which upholds is called dharma.



Values of Life

Values of life are the eternal constants of creation that can never be changed. Dharma is unchanging. It is Shāshvatam Dharma or Sanātana Dharma and are eternal values. I have to understand them and I can assimilate them. I can know that I cannot compromise them without damaging my physical, emotional, and intellectual health. This has to be understood.

Values are a set of non-rule rules. They are suggestions and guard rails intended to keep one on the “straight-and-narrow”. This straight-and-narrow is Dharma; Vedic and universal values which are to be embraced with one’s heart. By doing so, one will live a happier, more purposeful life. Yet, this is not an end in itself, as one will hopefully discover.

“A value is a value only when the value of that value is valuable to me.” Pūjya Śri Svāmī Dayānanda Saravatī

For a value to be my value, one has to discover the value of the value. What do I lose if I go against a value like Ahimsa? Ahimsa is the primary value of all values. The avoidance of injury through my words, actions & thoughts.

No being wants to get hurt, that is universal. All beings turn away from pain, sorrow, hurt. All beings want to be happy. I know how I want to be treated. I want to be cared for, appreciated, therefore it becomes my value to treat others the way I want to be treated.

My value of treating others kindly, lovingly and expressing my gratitude for them is my value to not hurt any being. Because I don’t want to get hurt. If I do the opposite I lose. What do I lose? I lose shantih, I lose peace. I will feel guilty. If another person invokes hurt in me, I have a value for welcoming that hurt, inquire into it and resolve it through knowledge without putting it out again, or project it onto the other person. He/she has a background for their behaviour, I can’t change another person, that is the value of Kshantih. Accommodation. I cannot change people yet I can have empathy and compassion. All beings do the best they can, that is the truth and has to be assimilated.



Each value is valuable to me because I have discovered the value of the value. Every situation is meant for growth. When I get upset, there is a violation of one of the values.

It says in the Vedas; "Dharmo rakshati rakshitaha. The one who protects dharma is protected by dharma"

This order is the law that upholds the functioning of the entire universe. We appreciate the manifest form of this order in terms of omniscience, in terms of fairness or justice and in terms of keeping everything together. Following this law in our life would be living a life of dharma. That is why the fundamental values of **ahimsā (non-injury), satya (truth), asteya (non-stealing), brahmacharya (heart connected relating), aparigraha (avoidance of greediness), amānitvam (absence of self-worshipfulness) and adambhitvam (absence of pretence) etc. (refer to the book The value of values) are taught.**

All of them mean only one thing. If you analyze them, they are the recognition of Brahman - one non dual being. For instance, when you analyze non-violence, or truthfulness, you find that they culminate in an order of life that sustains the entire universe and keeps it in harmony. This ultimate truth is Brahman. So the harmony that obtains in the universe is the meaning of dharma, or of any value. Therefore when we lead a life, which is in keeping with the values, it becomes a life, which is in keeping with the fundamental law of life and there is harmony.

There is harmony where there is dharma and there is disharmony where there is violation of dharma. Harmony is our being true to our own nature. So living a life of dharma is living a life in harmony with our own nature. Whenever we violate dharma, we are violating harmony and in this way violating ourselves, and it becomes stressful. Any stress can be traced to



violation of dharma, which is a violation of fundamental harmony. The answer to all stress management is to live a life in keeping with dharma.

It is not easy to live a life in keeping with dharma or the values, if the goal itself is not in keeping with dharma. **The goal must be dharma, and then alone is it possible to live by the means, which is dharma.** It is possible to live a life of dharma only if the goal is Brahman, the goal is the Self or if the goal is wholeness, or moksa. Because living a life of values is not easy, to let go of many things that adharma can bring us, is not easy!

Compromising our values can often appear to be quite beneficial. By compromising truth or by violating somebody, you can perhaps benefit in terms of the material gains of artha and kāma, or wealth, prosperity, name, fame, etc. Therefore in order for us to follow the values, it becomes necessary to overcome temptations of these benefits. There is a natural temptation for wealth and there is a natural temptation for recognition. These are acquired values. Growing up, we observe our society valuing these values, and therefore we also place a value upon these things. If these remain the goal of our life, it is very difficult to follow dharma.

Ideally, one can follow dharma when moksa is the goal of life. Then, there is no difficulty in letting go of anything. All that it amounts to is neti neti; let go, let go. In living a life in keeping with this dharma, we cultivate the values of viveka (discrimination), vairāgya (dispassion) and śama (mastery) dama (emotional management) uparama (doing ones duty) titiksha (endurance of the opposites like hot and cold) shraddha (trust in the vedanta) and samadhanam (single pointed focus). There are conflicts in life when we try to follow these values, even while our goal is not dharma. If Brahman or dharma is the goal, and if prāptasya prāptih, meaning acquiring that which is already acquired, is my goal, it is clear to me that nothing else needs to be acquired. Only then do I realize the value of following these values.



As the whole scheme of what Vedānta teaches becomes very clear, we develop an appreciation for the values and can live by them. Conflicts and stress will then disappear. Doing prānāyama and yoga without this fundamental shift in values, does not help much. Stress is basically a spiritual problem, which is not centered on the non-Self; it is centered on the Self. Therefore there must be a spiritual solution. It is not a problem of some chemicals! We may live such a stressful life that it becomes a chemical problem or a pathological problem, but that is a different matter. Stress stems from not understanding the fundamentals of life, not understanding the goal of life, or even having wrong goals. If artha and kāma, wealth and prosperity, or name and fame are the goals, dharma gets compromised. This is why dharma is placed first among the purushārthas. They are dharma, artha, kāma and moksa. May you acquire artha and kāma on the basis of dharma! Therefore, **dharma is a way of life.**

In the Bhagavad Gita it says:

May you look upon the universe as God! If you look upon the universe as God, then what is your relationship with the universe? I am a devotee, and God is the one to whom I am devoted. Therefore the relationship is such as between the bhakta and Bhagavān. Sva karmanā tam abhyarcya [BG 18-46], worship that Lord who is manifesting as the whole universe, through your own karma. This is how karma yoga becomes a worship of the Lord with a bhāvanā that the universe is nothing but that Lord. The bhāvanā comes first. It is a certain attitude that we entertain in our minds. For example, we are told to look upon all women as Mother. This is a bhāvanā. All women are not related to me as Mother but I look upon them as Mother. This bhāvanā must be in keeping with reality. If the bhāvanā is not in keeping with reality, it will not culminate in reality. So if the bhāvanā is that everything that exists is the Lord, this worship becomes a reality. Then it becomes jñānam - knowledge. You can acquire this jñānam provided that you start with the right attitude. The yoga of attitude leads to the yoga of knowledge - Vedanta.