

**MY WAY-
THE
HIGHWAY**

By

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INTRODUCTION

I have been expressing my personal views on various aspects of my way of life and I am happy to put all of them together for my friends and relatives to read and understand my feelings.

The views expressed are mine and my readers are free to accept them, reject them or follow them but those who wish to criticise these should offer equally valid alternatives or just relax and follow their own ways.

I am doing this for one reason only and that is to enlighten my people about Hinduism so that the future generations can freely follow the true essence of this credible way of life.

Hinduism provides the best form of family life if the followers refrain from hierocracy and obsolete ceremonies. It gives us the freedom to follow, pray and believe and we should just do these without any fear of contradiction. Let our home and heart be our greatest temple.

Truth, beauty and goodness remain the cornerstone of this powerful and open way of life.

Ram Lakhan Prasad

The Hindu Way of Life

“It is already becoming clear that a chapter that has a Western beginning will have to have an Indian ending if it is not to end in the self-destruction of the human race...At this supremely dangerous moment in human history, the only way of salvation is the ancient Hindu way. Here we have the attitude and spirit that can make it possible for the human race to grow together into a single family.”- Arnold Joseph Toynbee (1889-1975) British historian.

Knowledge I believe, should be given freely to all deserving students interested in learning. The thoughts presented here have been around for millennia and there is nothing original in this presentation. These are for people to read, analyse,

accept or reject if they have a better alternative.

So let us first look at the word Dharma. The word “Dharma” has no equivalent word in English. It takes many English words to describe Dharma. The word “religion” is commonly used but a religion is a specific system of institutionalized faith or worship.

“Sanātan Dharma” or “Mānav Dharma” is not a religion but a way of life. Everything we do in life, including preaching, praying, eating and sleeping, are done according to our own dharma. This is our way of life and living and we get used to it as we grow older and mature in our thoughts.

The Sanskrit word Dharma is derived from the root word “Dhri” which means to

hold together or support. Dharma supports or holds together everyone and everything. It supports and holds the person, the family, the community, the society and the country.

Dharma is also described as “duty” - ones duty towards oneself, ones family, community, country, and the world. Knowledge about our Dharma or what is right and wrong in our life will help and guide us through our lives. This knowledge should be learnt by every righteous person if an acceptable way of life has to be attained and accomplished.

Dharma is the universal code of behaviour towards all living creatures and nonliving things. It is in the best interest of all and includes all the virtues like truth, goodness, beauty, nobility, justice, non-violence, compassion, faith, duty, modesty, steadfastness, and

control over senses, our loyalty, our honesty and many other human traits.

Dharma is also absence of negative tendencies like selfishness, lust, greed, envy, anger, arrogance and similar feelings. A life according to Dharma is necessary for success in meditation. Dharma sustains and supports life in general, and helps to hold the community together.

Dharma has two parts –

- 1. Sāmānya Dharma – duties that are common to all people.**
- 2. Vishesha Dharma - is special duties of mother, father, husband, wife, child, student, teacher, farmer, businessperson, king, soldier, brother and sister.**

All these duties are described in ancient Indian literature but what happens when

“Dharma” is not followed? There are many examples in history of societies and civilizations that have fallen apart when the people have not followed the righteous path.

Even today we can see so many individuals, communities, countries wasting their valuable time, resources and thoughts after unethical projects, unnecessary traditional beliefs, and obsolete cultural practices and leading themselves, their families and people to disaster and confusion.

The word “Hindu” is not found in the ancient scriptures of India. It was the name given to the group of people by invaders. People living along the river Sindhu were called “Hindus” by foreigners. River Sindhu flows from Himalaya Mountain in the North and through North Western part of what was India.

Most of the foreign invaders came to India from the North-West. The religion followed by people of India was called “Hinduism” by the foreigners.

This is similar to how the original people of North America were called “Indians” by Europeans who were looking for “India” and when they first arrived in America thought they were in India.

The original people of India were called Āryans and Dravidians and the country was “Āryāvarta”. The people did not come from anywhere but had lived there for millennia and had developed a well advanced civilization. Other names for their religion were –Sanātan Dharma (eternal religion), Védic Dharma (religion of the Védas), Ārya Dharma (religion of the Āryans), or Mānav Dharma (religion of mankind).

The name of the country “India” was also coined by foreigners. The Indian names for India are “Āryāvarta” (the land of Āryans) or “Bhāratvarsha” (the land of king Bharat).

Culture has been defined in different ways. “A characteristic way of life inspired by fundamental values expressed through art, religion, literature, social institutions and behaviour”. It may also include education, scientific and technological advances, customs of the people, and the way in which people interact with each other and live in a civilized society.

“Indian” culture is one of the very few cultures that have continuously survived for quite a few millennia in spite of multiple invasions, brutal occupations by foreigners, and systematic attempts to destroy it.

How did it survive in India? A system of “Gurukul” or schools, strong family traditions, and the unique system of dividing the society into four classes with assigned duties for education, defence, trade, and service that helped maintain the knowledge and culture in India. The people with vested interest extended this division of labour into distasteful caste system that made the Hindu religion loose its core values and progress.

Knowledge of one’s cultural heritage is important for one’s self-esteem. When people loose their self-esteem and self-respect, they do not do well in life. It is very important for the welfare of our future generations that they learn the positive aspects of our culture and heritage and do not dwell in the negatives and unnecessary, obsolete and unwanted traditions that make us hypocrritical.

We cannot possibly learn and pass on to our children all that can be included in our “culture”. Not all of us may agree what is essential and what is not. The choice lies with the individual. Hinduism provides that freedom to pray, practice and perform whatever tradition and ceremonies suit us. There is no need for lavish and obsolete ceremonies. A belief in the essence of truth, beauty and goodness of living and a belief in the power of the Supreme Creator can give a person all that is needed to live a healthy and fruitful life.

Our culture shows us how to live our life whether we are in India, Australia, USA or anywhere else. It is therefore important to teach our children and grandchildren at the earliest age about their acceptable culture and heritage before their brains are filled with negative ideas about our “culture” and

they begin to follow unacceptable ways and methods of praying and beliefs.

Second reason for preserving cultural heritage is for the children to grow up having positive self-esteem, a good feeling about them. If children know that they are coming from a good, strong, and stable background, they will have the confidence to handle any situation and do well in life. If children learn at an early age that their culture, heritage, ancestors, were of inferior quality or that “they will burn in hell for eternity” because of their religion and their out dated religious practices then they are likely to have many problems.

I feel that one does not have to declare himself Hindu to conduct prayers. There is no system of conversion to Hinduism because we are born Hindus. Since there is only one God and we are all human, it

should be logical to pray in our own homes or in any house of religion anywhere. The early Hindus had no temples or mandirs but just found a peaceful place in their homes or environment to conduct their prayers.

Maybe this is the reason why Doctor Radhakrishnan told us that there was no need for any temple or specific place to conduct our prayers because the real place of prayer was our home and heart.

We all know that “God lives in everything” (omnipresent, omnipotent and omniscience). We as good human beings should freely and peacefully love God in our homes and hearts without any interference from anyone. There should be no requirement of any specific language or methods for our prayers. We should be able to conduct our prayers ourselves peacefully.

There is an “energy” that forms the basis of all that exists in the universe, a “force” that keeps us alive. Something that cannot be described nor can it be experienced by our senses (touch, smell, sight, hearing, and taste); an “entity” that can be addressed by any name or imagined to take up any form, and “that” which has no beginning or an end. I define this as my God.

For good human beings there are four goals in life:

1. Kāma (desire) – fulfilling desires to satisfy senses e.g. thirst, hunger, sex and others. These are common to all in the animal kingdom.

2. Artha (wealth) – earning money to buy food, shelter, clothes and other essential items. This goal is considered higher than

Kāma because it is not found in animal kingdom.

3. Dharma – Kāma and Artha are achieved according to Dharma. It is higher than both of them.

4. Moksha – liberation from the cycle of birth and death or merging of Ātmā (soul) with Paramātmā (God). This is the highest goal in life. All activities in the fields of Kāma and Artha give temporary pleasure. Moksha is permanent bliss.

I firmly believe that all human beings can achieve these goals. One does not have to pray to a specific “God” or belong to a specific religious sect to attain these.

Hindus believe in many things – from one all pervading God to many Gods and even no God. All views are accepted. Everyone has the freedom to choose and nobody is permanently denied Moksha (salvation).

Following beliefs are some of the important ones:

Ātmā (Self, soul, Jivātmā) and Paramātmā (Brahma, God).

The force or energy that keeps us alive is called Ātmā. Our body becomes life-less when it leaves our body. This energy can not be damaged or destroyed. It is the same in all living things. Paramātmā is the ocean of life-force from which all forms of Ātmā originate. After a process of evolution, all Ātmā merge with Paramātmā (God).

God can be worshiped in any form we wish and any name by which we want to call Him. All our prayers are heard by one and the same Supreme Reality (God).

Karma- Literal meaning of Karma is action. However, Karma includes the intentions behind the action, the means used in performing the action and the consequences of that action (Karma-phal). An “action” is good if the intention is unselfish and methods used are non-violent (according to Dharma).

We do not have any control over what follows the “action” (the consequences). Every act or even a

thought has similar consequences. “Good” thoughts and “good” actions have “good” consequences. We have choice only over our intentions and the means used to perform any action. If we do something for others with good intentions and without expecting anything in return for ourselves, good things will eventually happen to us. It is essential that we analyse our intentions continuously, do our best, work hard, persevere and leave the results to Him.

c. Punarjanma - (Rebirth). Just as we discard old clothes and take on new clothes, in the same way we discard old bodies and we obtain new bodies.

We believe that the soul leaves the body at the time of death and takes up another body (reincarnates) or becomes part and parcel of the Supreme Being, God Almighty. We are all evolving spiritually and take many births until we have no desires and all karmas are successfully resolved. Then our ātmā (soul) merges

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