

Ancient Wisdom of India

On

‘How to Become a Noble Citizen of the World’

(I Wish I had Learnt while in School)

Védic Dharma

Sanātan Dharma, Mānav Dharma

Dharma is a set of recommendations of many wise men developed over the centuries on ‘how to live one’s life’ that will hold together and support the whole society. This noble ‘way of life’ is good for the entire ecosystem and will bring peace within individuals, communities & countries; and lead to progress and prosperity for all.

By Arun J. Mehta

Please use this knowledge wisely, for the good of all, and pass it on to anyone who is genuinely interested in learning about 'How to live a life' according to Védic Dharma.

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Preface

After living in this body for 88 years, experiencing life in four continents and five countries; I thought I will share some wisdom I have gained from my readings, working with people, and personal experiences for grandchildren and all the children of the world. I wish I had learnt these lessons earlier in life but its never too late! I hope a few of these suggestions may help even one young child in her / his life.

Why ‘Ancient Wisdom’ is Important for the ‘Modern Times’?

Mother Earth is going through a very difficult time with widespread hunger, epidemics killing millions, weapons of mass destruction ready to be fired, wildfires, drought, mass migration of desperate people, religious fanaticism, incompetent & selfish leaders, etc., etc. There are millions of children going to bed hungry, parents reluctantly abandoning them and encouraging them to travel alone hundreds of miles to go to another country for a better life, millions of men, women and children running away from violent conflicts in the name of religion or ideology, fast deteriorating environment and increasing pollution. Politicians in power are there for their own fame, fortune and re-election. Greedy billionaires controlling multinational corporations and political leaders have ruined the environment by burning forests and ruining farmland and rivers. Religious leaders have not set a ‘good’ example either. Even in India this ‘way of life’ is forgotten and neglected. As a consequence India suffered from many brutal and barbaric invasions by foreigners for more than a thousand years. Movements to improve the situation were initiated by many reformers.

There may be a lot of factors ‘why we (humans) have failed’ to improve the situation:

1. Leaders without a ‘Grand Vision’ that is good for all.
2. Poor selection of ‘Leaders’ under ‘Democratic, Theocratic, Socialist, Communist & Monarchist’ governments.
3. Inadequate and / or inappropriate education of children in morals and ethics.
4. Biased and corrupt politicians, media and academicians singing the tune of who ever pays them the most.

The root cause in most of the present day problems is:

Lack of knowledge and / or practice of ‘Morals & Ethics’ from leaders down to the common men.

यथा राजा तथा प्रजा ।

As is the King, so are his subjects.

Leaders - political, religious, sports celebrities, Hollywood & Bollywood actors and actresses
- all have important roles to play because we tend to follow one or more of these leaders.

Four *Yug*-s (periods)

In India, the history is divided into four time periods (युग *Yug*). In the first period - Satyug (*Sat* = Truth) - the Age of Truth - vast majority of humans lived their lives according to highest moral and ethical standards. This gradually deteriorated to less than 75% of the population in second - the *Tretā Yug* followed by *Dvāpar Yug*. At present we are in *Kaliyug* - the fourth and last period. In this period, less than 25% of the human population follow a life dictated by morals & ethics. This proportion will diminish gradually and the world as we know, will be destroyed at the end of this period.

The whole world is in turmoil (2024). Violent and non-violent conflicts are going on in many countries, illegal migration has paralyzed most of Europe, nations are grabbing land from other countries, excessive pesticides and fertilizers have polluted the land, there are extreme climate changes causing floods and drought, and few people who have money are spending it as if there is no tomorrow. All these phenomena described in Bhāgavatam describe the signs of *Kaliyuga*, the last of the four periods of time. People wonder about solutions to these mega problems facing humanity.

How can we improve the situation?

Unless the majority of the people change the way we all live, there is very little hope of improving the situation. This is no easy task.

**आरोप्यते शिला शैले यत्नेन महता यथा ।
पात्यते तु क्षणनाधस्तथात्मा गुणदोषयोः ॥**

हितोपदेशः २.१६

***It is very hard work to carry a large rock up a hill
but it is very easy to let it roll down the hill.
In the same manner it is very hard to generate noble
thoughts and teach ethical behavior to someone
but it is very easy to teach unethical or immoral behavior.***

Hitopadesha, 2:16

***“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

Young children growing up in this increasingly complex world may get inappropriate or contradictory advice. It may be hard for them to decide who is right and who is wrong. They need to develop the art of thinking, analyzing the situation, evaluating pros and cons, and deciding about an action plan to achieve their goals.

India, what Can it Teach us?

How can the knowledge from Ancient India help us? It tells us “What are the weaknesses of human beings?”, “What are the characteristics of an ‘Ideal Person’ or an ‘Ideal Citizen of the World?’ and finally “How can we all become that ‘Ideal Person’?”

***“If I were asked under what sky the human mind has
most fully developed some of its choicest gifts,
has most deeply pondered on the greatest problems of life,
and has found solutions of some of them
which well deserve the attention even of those who have
studied Plato and Kant -I should point to India.
And if I were to ask myself from what literature we, here in
Europe, we who have been nurtured almost exclusively on
the thoughts of Greeks and Romans, and of one Semitic race,
the Jewish, may draw that corrective which is most wanted
in order to make our inner life more perfect,
more comprehensive, more universal, in fact more truly
human, a life, not for this life only, but a transfigured and
eternal life –again I should point to India.”***

“India, what Can it Teach us?” by F. Max Muller, KM

A course of lectures delivered before the University of Cambridge.

Pub. Longmans, Green, and Co., London, 1883.

Whole World is a Family

अयं बन्धुरयनेति गणना लघुचेतसाम् ।
उदारचरितानां तु वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम् ॥ ६:७१ ॥

***Ayam bandhuh ayam néti gaṇanāṃ laghuchetsām
Udāracharitānām tu vasudhaiva kutumbakam***

***A (spiritually) less evolved person says 'This is a friend. That
one is not.'***

***To a broad minded (spiritually evolved) person the whole
world is a family.***

Mahopanishad VI.71

If these basic concepts are adopted by the majority of people, it can improve the lives of innumerable people and change the future course of this world. These *Sanskrit Shlok*-s were composed a very, very long time ago by wise men and women. They have been passed down through generations by oral tradition.

The thoughts presented here have been around for millennia and there is nothing original in this booklet. It is written for high school and university students in a language simple enough so that they can understand. It is recommended that readers read a small segment - a paragraph or a page - at a time. They should feel free to discuss with their parents or other knowledgeable adults. They may write to me at my email address too. Contemplation on the material followed by practicing it in everyday life will be the real test of usefulness of these ancient teachings. Hope this booklet helps someone learn to survive, be happy and help others in their lives. This knowledge and practices could bring the community of men together, work towards the common good of the society and the world and do not do any harm to anyone.

The request is for all of us to live like a family, work with each other, cooperate, live in peace and harmony, and prosper. We adults have made a lot of mistakes. This booklet is for young adults to learn and guide the world away from violence, exploitation, and misery towards peace and prosperity. This booklet is written for the youth - the future leaders of the world - who may gain some insights on 'how to lead one's life and become an ideal citizen of the world (*Aryan*). I have tried to present this material in language simple enough so that a busy high school or university student can understand. In the true *Védic* tradition, knowledge is given free to all deserving students interested in learning. The thoughts presented here have been around for millennia and there is nothing original in this booklet.

All Sanskrit (Sanskrit) words are in italics. Plural versions of Sanskrit words e.g. *Védas* are written with – before 's', like *Véda-s*. *Ā* & *ā* are pronounced as in 'bark'. *é* is pronounced as first 'e' in 'level' and *ń* as *Devnāgari* ण (no equivalent sound in English). European spelling of *Sanskrit* words is written in parenthesis as (Sanskrit). Attempts are made to spell Sanskrit words as they are spoken in *Sanskrit*.

I am grateful to Dr. B. V. K. Sastry of International Védic Hindu University, Florida, USA for very helpful suggestions. He went over the draft of the first edition for accuracy. I also appreciate comments and suggestions by my wife, Lila Mehta and daughter Angana Shroff.

This effort is dedicated to grandchildren Arjun, Anya, Ravi and all the children of the world with love & best wishes.

A request to the reader:

**भग्न-पृष्ठ-कटि-ग्रीवं स्तब्ध-दृष्टिर् अद्यो-मुखम् ।
कष्टेन लिखितं ग्रन्थं यत्नेन परिपालयेत् ॥**

***A damaged neck, an aching back,
Burning red eyes - these pains of mine.
To write this book for you, my friend,
I hope you read it carefully,
make an effort to put it into practice and find it helpful.***

Subhāshitani

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Dharma

The word “*Dharma*” has no equivalent word in English. *Dharma* is described as ‘religion’ in dictionaries but it is much more than that. 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. Some people think of religion as performing rituals, visiting temples, celebrating festivals, pilgrimage, etc., but it is much more than that. “*Sanātan Dharma*” or “*Mānav Dharma*” is not a religion because no single Prophet initiated or established it and it’s always evolving - not rigid or stagnant. In India it is labeled as a religion for political reasons. Everything we do in life, including eating and sleeping, are done according to *Dharma*. *Védic Dharma* was practiced in India more than 5,000 years ago, long before any of the Prophets were born. During the British Rāj, as part of their policy of divide and rule, religion, caste, and sub-caste were given a lot of importance. Since Hindus were the majority, all other religious groups were given special privileges and even tax breaks. This created a lot of animosity amongst all, weakened India and reduced chances of any resistance movement to succeed against the British. Religious labels became important and ‘Hinduism’ became a religion. Religion has become a very divisive force in the modern world exploiting and intimidating people of ‘other’ religions, creating animosity leading to violence, and even wars.

The *Sanskrit* word *Dharma* is derived from the root word ‘*Dhri*’, which means to hold together or support for everyone in the society. *Dharma* is also described as ‘duty’ - one’s duty towards herself, her family, community, country, and the world. Knowledge about *Dharma* - what is right and wrong - helps us guide through our lives. This knowledge should be taught when a child is very young and not at the end of life, during retirement or when someone is on deathbed. It is too late to know ‘how to lead a life’ when we have gone through most of it.

***Dharma is a set of recommendations of many wise men developed over the centuries
on ‘how to live one’s life’ that will hold together and support the whole society.***

***This noble ‘way of life’ is good for the entire ecosystem
and will bring peace within individuals, communities & countries;
And lead to progress and prosperity of all.***

Dharma is the universal code of behavior towards all living creatures and even nonliving things. It is in the best interest of all and includes all the virtues like truth, nobility, justice, nonviolence, compassion, faith, duty, modesty, steadfastness, control over senses, loyalty, honesty, etc. *Dharma* is also the absence of negative tendencies like selfishness, lust, greed, envy, anger, arrogance, etc. A life according to *Dharma* is necessary for success in meditation and also for peace and prosperity of the family, community, country and the world. *Dharma* sustains and supports life in general, and helps to hold the community together.

The word *Dharma*, at a higher intellectual or philosophical level is that without which we will not be able to exist in peace and prosper. It is the essence of our existence. It is that, 'force' without which this world as we know will not be able to survive.

Védic or Sanātana Dharma

Véd-s are considered to be the final highest authority. *Dharma* that is followed based on *Véd-s* is called *Védic Dharma*. It is also called *Sanātana* (eternal) *Dharma*. It is like a Constitution or law of a nation (*Samvidhāna* संविधान). The Constitution is for governing a country for its development, prosperity, peace, security and to regulate the activities of all the citizens. The weak need to be protected from the powerful & the rich. *Dharma* is described as 'divine, universal constitution' - a noble path to be followed by all for peace, spiritual progress, prosperity and happiness in this life and even after death in the next life (*Pooner-janma* = rebirth) or *Moksh* (liberation from the cycle of birth & death). It is meant for the wellbeing of all - human beings, animals, plants, earth, water, etc. It also tells us our 'Purpose' in life.

***Dharma Shāstra* (धर्म शास्त्र)**

A *Shāstra* is a systematic exposition of subjects like sciences and scriptures. It covers all aspects of a subject. The root word *shās* means to teach. The word 'tra', in *Shāstra* means protection (*shāsnāt trāyaté iti Shāstra* = the knowledge that protects you from dangers is *Shāstra*). A *Shāstra* is a scripture that protects an individual that follows its teachings.. The knowledge which teaches you 'how to protect yourself from making harmful, bad, or wrong decisions in life'. Or *Hitam upanishati iti Shāstra* = that which teaches you 'what is good for you' - your welfare, well-being, etc. *Sanātana Dharma* is a *Shāstra* of this category.

What is the Goal?

What do we want to achieve by learning about *Dharma* and practicing it in everyday life?
Dharma teaches us 'how to live our lives' so that we all can achieve:

यतोऽभ्युदयनिःश्रेयससिद्धिः स धर्मः ॥ १.१.२ ॥

Yato abhyudaya nihshréyasa siddhiḥ sa Dharmaḥ || 1.1.2 ||

Vaisheshika sūtra 1.1.2

***Those activities that lead to peace, progress, prosperity
(of all in this Universe)
and supreme, permanent bliss is Dharma.***

Who is fit (*Adhikari*) to receive this knowledge?

Dharma is for all human beings - without consideration of age, sex, race, religion, etc. Only humans have that capacity to think, understand these concepts and ability to practice them. This knowledge is very important in modern turbulent times and is universally applicable. If age-appropriate lessons are taught to all school children and these principles are practiced throughout life, the world would be a much better place for everyone.

Hinduism

Védic, Sanātan or Mānav Dharma

The Sanskrit root word *Vid* means to know and *Véd* means (sacred) knowledge. There are four *Véda*-s: *Roog* (Rig), *Yajur*, *Sāma*, and *Atharva*. *Véda*-s were revealed to *Rooshi*-s (rishi) during meditation thousands of years ago. The knowledge of *Véda*-s is timeless. The end (anta) portion of *Véda*-s is called *Vedānta* (*Ved* + *anta*). *Vedānta* is also called Upanishad. The Upanishad-s are declarations of the highest spiritual truths and a guide for ‘How to live our life’. Most of us ask our children to read *Bhagavad Gitā* when we are on the deathbed. It is like reading the instruction manual for a super computer when we are ready to throw it in a junk yard. *Bhagavad Gitā* is the cream of the *Upanishad*-s. Pearls of wisdom are also found in *Rāmāyan*, *Mahābhārat*, *Bhāgavat Purān*, etc.

Védic, *Sanātan* and *Mānav* are also *Sanskrit* words used for our *Dharma*.

‘*Sanātan* = eternal - A *Dharma* that has been there from the beginning of time or one that has no beginning or end.

Dharma = code of ethics, code of behavior, religion, virtues, beliefs, moral obligations, traditions, righteous actions that sustain and support life, and hold a community together.

Sanātan Dharma = *Dharma* or code of ethics which has always existed.

Mānav = Man (includes woman).

Mānav Dharma = religion or code of ethics, or code of behavior for mankind.

The original people of India were called *Āryan*-s or the ‘noble ones’ and the country was ‘*Āryāvarta*’. The *Āryan*-s 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 based on *Véda*-s), *Ārya Dharma* (religion of the *Āryan*-s), or *Mānav Dharma* (religion of mankind). The name of the country ‘India’ was coined by foreigners. The Indian names for India are ‘*Āryāvarta*’ (the land of *Āryan*-s) or ‘*Bhāratvarsha*’ (the land of king Bharat).

A major river ran through the North-Western part of *Bhāratvarsha*, called *Sindhu* (Indus River). People living along the River *Sindhu* were called ‘Hindus’ by foreigners. Most of the foreign invaders came to India from the North-West and had to cross this River. The religion followed by people of India was called “Hinduism” by the foreigners.

***Dharma* has two parts –**

1. *Sāmānya Dharma* – duties that are common to all people.
2. *Vishésha Dharma* - is the special duties of husband, wife, child, student, teacher, farmer, business person, king, soldier, etc.

All these duties are described in ancient Indian literature.

What happens when “*Dharma*” is not followed? There are many examples in history of societies and civilizations that have fallen apart. Even today we can see so many individuals, communities, and countries wasting their resources after unethical projects and leading their families & people to disaster.

Culture

Culture has been defined in many different ways. In “Foundations of Indian Culture”, K. M. Munshi has defined culture as:

“A characteristic way of life inspired by fundamental values expressed through art, religion, literature, social institutions and behavior”.

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 society. The inherited moral values, beliefs, and traditions of the people create a national identity which unite people to work together for the benefit of all.

He mentions that the ‘Indian’ culture is one of the very few cultures that has continuously survived for quite a few millennia in spite of multiple invasions, brutal occupations by foreigners, and systematic attempts to destroy it. Very little of the original Egyptian, Babylonian, Syrian, Persian, Inca, or Mayan culture is visible now.

How did it survive in India?

Before all the invasions by foreigners, a system of ‘*Gurukul*’ schools existed in India that provided free education to all, strong family traditions, and the unique system of dividing the society into four classes with assigned duties for education, defense, trade, and service (*Varhāshram*) that helped maintain the knowledge and culture in India. The ‘*Gurukul*’ system was destroyed during British rule by starting schools which taught from text books written by the British that depicted Indian history as myth, scriptures as ‘meaningless babblings of primitive people’, *Sanskrit* as a ‘dead’ language, Indian culture and traditions, diet, etc. as inferior. Jobs were given only to those who had studied in Christian schools. Disastrous effects of Government supported Christian Missionary schools on the Indigenous people of Canada is coming to light now with rampant unemployment, poverty, alcoholism, diseases and early death.

Why preserve our ancient culture?

Knowledge of one's cultural heritage is important for self-esteem. When people lose 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. There are fine lines between arrogance, healthy self-esteem, and being too humble. Self-esteem is a positive feeling about one self. It depends on your feelings about your-self, your family & heritage. It gives us confidence in ourselves, what we do, how we deal with insults or humiliating behavior of others and succeed in life. At the same time we need to be humble and not become big-headed or boastful. Blind adaptation of foreign diet and lifestyle in present day India (2020s) has led to rampant diabetes and obesity with serious consequences later on in life.

How can we preserve our cultural heritage?

***“Children have never been good at listening to their elders,
but they have never failed to imitate them.”***

James Baldwin

Mothers, teachers and schools play a very important role in teaching children about their culture, national pride, family and social relationship, etc. Our scriptures give great importance to the education of female children. *Véd-s* encourages women to undergo *Upanayana* - thread ceremony - that initiates them in *Védic* studies.

***“Parents should gift their daughters the power of knowledge.
When she leaves for the husband's home,
They should give her a dowry of knowledge.”***

Roog (Rig) Véd (ऋग्वेद)

This tradition was obliterated by threats of abduction of girls attending school by foreign rulers in India.

Other recommendations:

1. Learn, Practice, and Teach. We, adults, have to set a good example by learning about our heritage and culture and practice it in everyday life.
2. Enroll children in *Balvihar* classes (Sunday schools that teach our languages, heritage, and culture).

If your plan is for one year, plant rice.

If your plan is for ten years, plant trees.

If your plan is for one hundred years, educate children.

Confucius (551-479 BCE)

3. Pray or recite *shlok*-s in the early morning, evening and before meals.
4. Read Indian classics like *Rāmāyan*, *Mahābharat*, *Bhagawad Gitā*, etc. to children.
5. Speak to children in at least one Indian language.
6. There are many CDs of devotional music available. Expose children to these at home or while driving to school or on trips. Teach children to sing classical or devotional Indian music.
7. *Bhāratnāṭyam* dance is based on our heritage. Encourage children to learn *Bhāratnāṭyam*.
8. Perform simple *Puja* at home and explain the meaning of the ritual. Celebrate festivals and observe various *Sanskār*-s. Visit a local temple.
9. Select healthy recipes, cook and eat nutritious Indian food. Most of our spices in moderation and our dishes are being accepted as healthy alternatives to Western diet.
10. Raise children with love and open lines of communication. Treat little children with lots of love. Get them to help in household chores from age three and as long as they are living with you, and when they are 16 years old treat them like a friend.

Essence of Ancient Indian Culture

We cannot possibly learn and pass on to our children all that can be included in our ‘culture’. All of us may not agree - ‘what is essential and what is not’. The choice lies with each individual family.

Importance of Teaching *Védic* Culture

Our culture shows us how to live our life whether we are in India or North America or anywhere else in the world. It is therefore important to teach our children and grandchildren at the earliest age about their culture and heritage before their brains are filled with negative ideas about our ‘culture’ from school and University text books and some teachers. Second reason for preserving cultural heritage is for the children to grow up having positive self-esteem, a good feeling about themselves. 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, and ancestors were of inferior quality or ‘they will burn in hell for eternity’ because of their religion then they are likely to have many problems throughout their lives.

Essence of *Védic* Culture

“...if all the Upanishads and all other scriptures happened all of a sudden to be reduced to ashes, and if only the first verse in the ‘Ishopanishad’ were left intact in the memories of Hindus, Hinduism will live forever.”

M. K. Gāndhi, Harijan, 30-1-1937, p. 403-4.

**ॐ ईशावास्यमिदम् सर्वं यत् किञ्च जगत्यां जगत् ।
तेन त्यक्तेन भुञ्जीथा मा गृधः कस्य स्विद्धनम् ॥१॥**

**“ॐ Ishāvāsyā-idam sarvam yat-kincha jagatyām jagat
Téna tyakténa bhunjithā mā grudah kasya svid dhanam”**

**God pervades all this, the whole universe.
Enjoy what He gives you. Do not steal the wealth of others.**

Ishopanishad 1

First part of the first *Shlok* tells us ‘The Divine spirit is everywhere in the universe - in the living and the non-living. Love and respect all creatures and treat even inanimate objects with respect. 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 any of 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. Be grateful for what He / She / It gives you, respect Her gift and enjoy it. Do not forcefully take something that belongs to others.

Another basic teaching is:

एकं सद् विप्रा बहुधा वदन्ति

**Ekam sat viprā bahudhā vadanti
Truth (God) is one, the wise call ‘It’ by many names.**

Roog (Rig) Véd (ऋग्वेद) 1:164:46

People prefer to address God by various names but ultimately ‘He’, ‘She’ or ‘It’ is the same entity. This is misunderstood by many, thinking that their ‘God’ is the only true ‘God’ and they can use violence, lies, cheating, coercion, etc. (*Adharma*) to convert people in the name of their religion.

Sadāchār (Good Conduct)

The Divine Principle (God) pervades the whole Universe - living and the non-living. We are expected to respect everything and treat them as we would like to be treated. Since all actions have their roots in our thoughts, the mind has to be pure and full of noble thoughts. Speech and actions then follow and are full of love and respect for all.

**विद्याविनयसम्पन्ने ब्राह्मणे गवि हस्तिनि |
शुनि चैव श्वपाके च पंडिताः समदर्शिनः ॥ ५:१८ ॥**

***Enlightened people behave with all others in the same
manner (with love & respect) whether it is a cow, an
elephant, a dog or even a person who eats dogs
(lowest of the low in the society).***

Bhagavad Gitā, V:18



Our Basic Beliefs

Védantin-s (those who believe in *Véd*-s, ie. - 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 *Moksh* (salvation). Following are some of the important beliefs:

1. *Ātmā* (Self, soul, *Jivātmā*) and *Paramātmā* (Brahman, God)

The force or energy that keeps us alive is called *Ātmā*. Our body becomes life-less when it leaves the body. This energy cannot be damaged or destroyed. It is the same in all living beings. *Paramātmā* is the ocean of life-force from which all *Ātmā*-s originate. After a process of evolution, all *Ātmā*-s merge with *Paramātmā* (God). God can be worshiped in any form we wish to give Him or Her, any name he / she wants to call Her / Him / It. All prayers are heard by one and the same Supreme Reality (God).

God has been described as follows:

***There, the eye goes not, nor the words, nor the mind.
We know not. We cannot understand
how 'He' can be explained.
'He' is above the known, and 'He' is above the unknown.
Thus have we heard from the ancient sages
who explained this truth to us.***

Sām Véd, Kén Upanishad 1.3

***As fragrance abides in the flower,
as reflection is within the mirror,
so does your Lord abide within you.
Why search for Him without?***

Guru Nanak Devji (1469-1539), founder of Sikhism

Many names of 'God'

एकं सद् विप्राः बहुधा वदन्ति अग्निं यमं मातरिश्वानम् आहुः ॥

***There is only one Truth (God)
Sages call it by different names
such as agni (fire), yama, vāyu (wind), etc.***

2. Karma

Literal meaning of *Karma* is action. However, *Karma* in scriptures includes the intentions behind the action, the means used in performing the action and the consequences (fruit) of that action (*Karma-phala*). An 'action' is good if the intention is unselfish and methods used are nonviolent (according to *Dharma*). We do not have any control over what follows the 'action' (the result or 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 too. It is essential that we analyze our intentions continuously, do our best, work hard, persevere, and leave the results to Him.

3. *Punarjanm* (Rebirth)

**वासांसि जीर्णानि यथा विहाय
नवानि गृह्णाति नरोऽपराणि ।
तथा शरीराणि विहाय जिर्णानि
अन्यानि संयाति नवानि देही ॥**

***Vāsāṁsi jirñāni yathā vihāya
Navāni gruhṇāti naroparāṇi
Tathā sharirāṇi vihāya jirñāni
Anyāni samyāti navāni dehi.***

***Just as we discard old clothes and
Put on new (clothes).
In the same way (we) discard old bodies
(And we) obtain new bodies.***

Bhagawad Gitā, II. 22.

We believe that the soul leaves the body at the time of death and takes up another body (reincarnates). We are all evolving spiritually and take many births until we have no desires and all *Karma*-s resolved. Then our *Ātmā* (soul) merges with *Paramātmā* (*Brahman*, God) and attains liberation from the cycle of birth and death (*Moksh*). Everyone, even an animal, is entitled to *Moksh*.

If at the time of death we have any unfulfilled desire or unresolved *Karma* then we take birth in a new body. We are born in a family and under circumstances according to our unresolved *Karma*-s and unfulfilled desires. This gives us the opportunity to progress spiritually.

4. Scriptures

The holy scriptures - *Vēd*-s, were revealed to *Rooshi*-s in deep meditation.

Goals or Purpose in Life

Why do we need 'Goals'?

If we want to achieve something in our lives, we need to know what we want to achieve, how we are going to achieve it, do we have the capacity to achieve the goal, etc.

***“Our plans miscarry because they have no aims.
When a man does not know what harbor he is making for,
no wind is the right wind.”***

Seneca

What are we all looking for?

We all want to be 'happy' in life. Those who do not have money think money will bring happiness. Those who are not married, think marriage will bring happiness. We are always looking for happiness somewhere outside - like a big house or a fancy car. On and on goes the wish list. But if we look at the rich or married people, we will find that they are not totally happy all the time. They are still looking for happiness somewhere else. These external objects do not keep us in a state of happiness for too long. We are all looking for this bliss in wrong places or in objects because this pleasure, happiness does not last for long. We all need basic necessities of life - clean air to breathe, water, food, shelter, good health, etc. Beyond that, we should be looking for the 'right' way of life with the 'right' attitude.

Goal or Most Important Pursuit of Life

Is to personally realize or experience or gain the knowledge about ‘Self’ (*Ātmā*) and *Brahman* (the Universal Energy or God). This involves learning ‘how to live a life according to Dharma by reading books or listening to lectures by learned people and then practicing Meditation (ध्यान). Desire for pleasures of the senses leads us away from this path. Total control over all senses, organs of actions like speech, etc. and mind (thoughts) are essential steps in this process. All energies are focussed on attaining *Brahman*.

Our *shāstra*-s (sacred texts) mention four goals in life

1. *Kām* (desire) – fulfilling desires to satisfy the senses e.g. thirst, hunger, etc. These are common to all in the animal kingdom.
2. *Arth* (wealth) – earning money to buy food, shelter, etc. This goal is considered higher than *Kām* because it is not found in the animal kingdom. However, wealth is like a knife - it can be used as a destructive weapon and also as a useful tool in everyday life. Blind pursuit of wealth creates degeneration of human values. The destructive power of desire to become very wealthy lies in creating lust, greed, desire to hoard tons of money, exploitation of other humans, animal & plant life and also other natural resources.

**यावत् भ्रियेत जडरं तावत् सत्त्वं हि देहीनाम् ।
अधिकं योभिमन्येत स स्तेनो दण्डमर्हति ॥**

***One may [rightfully] claim proprietorship to as much wealth
as is required to maintain oneself [to fill the stomach];
but he/she who claims proprietorship over more than what
is required for survival is a thief and deserves to be punished.***

Mahābhārat and Manusmruti

In other words:

“Live simply so that others may simply live.”

Mahātmā Gāndhī

3. *Dharma* – The first two goals, *Kām* and *Arth* are achieved according to recommendations in *Dharma*. *Dharma* is higher than both (*Kām and Arth*). This requires study of *Dharma* early in life and practicing it all through life.

4. **Moksh** – In the ancient Indian tradition, the ultimate goal is to go beyond the cycle of birth and death by merging *Ātmā* (soul) with *Paramātmā* (God). This is the highest goal in life. All activities in the fields of *Kām* and *Arth* give temporary pleasure. *Moksh* is permanent bliss. According to *Védānt* all human beings and even animals can achieve this goal. One does not have to pray to a specific ‘God’ or belong to a specific religious sect. Even people who do not believe in ‘God’ may live a life according to *Dharma* and achieve this ‘ultimate goal’.

**प्रणवो धनुः शरो ह्यात्मा ब्रह्म तल्लक्ष्यमुच्यते ।
अप्रमत्तेन वेदध्वं शरवत् तन्मयो भवेत् ॥४॥**

***Pranavo dhanuhu sharah hee ātmā
Brahm tat lakshyam uchyate
Apramatténa véd dhavyam
Shara-vat tanmayo bhavét.***

***Pranavah (mantra ॐ) is the bow and
Ātmā (soul) is the arrow.
Brahman (God, Paramātmā) is the target (goal).
(With) steady (hands and focused mind) hit (the target)
And like the arrow (Ātmā),
become one with the target (Brahman).***

Mundakopnishad II.ii.4

The symbol of *Brahman* (God) is ॐ. It is used for meditating and for addressing all our requests to *Brahman*. All life forms are evolving. Humans are capable of critical thinking, analyzing situations and deciding on a plan of action. Hopefully if we get the right guidance we all should be able to evolve and become ‘ideal citizens of the world’. This topic will be considered in greater detail in the next chapter.

Characteristics of an Ideal Citizen of the World

The modern state of affairs makes us wonder - 'Why humans have failed?', 'How can we improve?' and the reasons for 'Why we need to work towards developing an 'Ideal Character'?', have been mentioned in the 'Preface' of the book. Now we will consider the virtues we all need to develop to live a 'moral & ethical' life. These virtues are common to all (*Sāmānya Dharma*) - whether one is a billionaire or a President or a homeless person?

Sāmānya Dharma

A person is considered wise when he /she lives life according to following guidelines:

1. A wise person always tries to live life according to the highest moral and ethical principles as prescribed in *Vedic Dharma* (described in Chapter 8 Important Values).
2. She has a 'higher' purpose in life than just to 'eat, drink and be merry'.
3. He works honestly and hard to achieve his goals. Negative emotions like anger, greed, etc.; do not affect his goals, speech, or actions.
4. She does not employ negative tendencies like selfishness, anger, pride, arrogance, ruthlessness, deceit, etc. to obtain prestige, power or prosperity.

A not so wise person:

1. Someone who is ignorant about his / her *Dharma*, does not study scriptures or learn from wise people.
2. He is proud & arrogant and easily loses his temper.
3. To achieve her means and selfish goals she will do anything, even use unethical and immoral tactics.
4. He feels insecure and jealous of others with more wealth or power.

We perform actions to satisfy a DESIRE. This is the main driving force behind all actions. We drink because we are thirsty. We eat because we are hungry. All our desires need to be fulfilled according to the principles of Dharma - morals & ethics.

Our Conduct should be such that:

1. We behave during the day so that we can have a restful night.
2. Conduct yourself in youth so that you are happy and healthy during old age.
3. Act during your whole life so that we reap benefits of good behavior in the next life.

Our scriptures describe “What our weaknesses and strengths are”. Every day we need to evaluate our own behavior and decide on one or two weaknesses on which we need to work on to improve.

According to the ancient Indian tradition following three are the most important characteristics of an ideal citizen of the world:

1. Truth (*Satya*)

The official seal of India says:

सत्यं एव जयते

Satyaṁ éva jayaté.

Truth always prevails.

There are three meanings of the word ‘truth’:

1. The dictionary meaning of truth is ‘what is real’.
2. Second meaning of truth is ‘when our speech and actions are the same as our thoughts’.
3. In Véd-s ‘Truth’ means what is real today, what was the same yesterday, a hundred years ago, and even a billion years ago; what will be the same tomorrow, a hundred years from today, and even a billion years from now. In other words, something that does not change over time. That ‘Truth’ is changeless, beginning-less, and endless. It is the description of Paramātmā (Brahman, God, the Supreme Power). Not everyone believes in ‘God’ and that view is acceptable in Védic tradition too.

The first two Truths (1 and 2) are to be practiced. The third is a goal to be achieved by becoming an ideal person. Different interpretations of the word 'Truth' can be confusing.

2. Nonviolence (*Ahimsā*)

अहिंसा परमो धर्म

‘Ahimsā paramo Dharma

,

Nonviolence is the supreme Dharma.

***Nonviolence leads to the highest ethics, which is the goal of
all evolution.***

***Until we stop harming all other living beings,
we are still savages.***

Thomas A. Edison (1847-1931), American inventor

The practice of Ahimsā includes not harming anyone in our thoughts, by words, and by our actions. We can see all over the world that once the cycle of violence is started it is very difficult to control. Ahimsā and universal love go together. However, the greatest practitioner of nonviolence, Mahātmā Gāndhi, said that:

“My creed of non-violence is an extremely active force.

It has no room for cowardice or even weakness.

***There is hope for a violent man to someday be non-violent,
but there is none for a coward.***

***I have, therefore, said more than once.....that if we do not
know how to defend ourselves, our women and our places of
worship by the force of sufferings, i.e., non-violence,
we must, if we are men, be at least able to defend all these by
fighting.”***

M. K. Gāndhi, Young India, 16 June 1927

There are circumstances when we may have to resort to violence. For example if we or other innocent people are being attacked and there is no other way to protect them then violent means may have to be adopted.

अहिंसा परमो धर्मः धर्मः हिंसा च ।

‘Ahimsā paramo Dharma, Dharma himsā cha.’

**Nonviolence is the supreme Dharma,
And violence according to (the rules of) Dharma (is a duty)
too.**

3. Self-discipline (ब्रह्मचर्य - *Brahmacharya*, दम - *Dum*)

Brahmacharya means searching for *Brahman* or moving towards *Brahman*. It can also mean moving around in the field of *Brahman* or behavior of someone who wants to attain *Brahman*. To attain this state of enlightenment a disciplined life with mastery over all senses (taste, touch, smell, vision, hearing) is very essential. These ‘senses’ can be like ‘wild horses’ and if they are dictating our actions; they can drive us over a cliff. If our senses take control over our actions then we do not have time for worthwhile projects and our energies are diverted towards ‘fun’ activities.

**इन्द्रियाणां तु सर्वेषां यदेकं क्षरति इन्द्रियम् ।
तेन अस्य क्षरति दत्तेः पादाद् एव उदकम् ॥**

**All knowledge leaves that person
Whose even a single sense is uncontrolled,
Just as water drains away from a leaking water vessel.**

Manu Smriti, II.99

We have five sense organs - sight, hearing, taste, touch and smell - and five organs of action - tongue, hands, feet, excretion and procreation. They are under control of our mind. Our minds are under the control of discriminatory intelligence which tells us what is good and what is not good for us.

**न जातु कामः कामानां उपभोगेन शाम्यति ।
हविषा कृष्णावर्त्मा इवभूय एव अभिवर्धते ॥**

***Desires are not satisfied (quenched) by their enjoyment.
Like pouring ghee (clarified butter) over fire it makes them
more deep rooted.***

Manu Smruti, II.94

***It is the nature of any desire never to be fulfilled,
but he who utterly gives them up
(all selfish & extreme desires)
feels eternally fulfilled (satisfied, complete)
at that very moment.***

Tirukural 370

Brahmacharya is learnt during the first 25 years of life (*Brahmcharyāshram*) and this restraint is practiced all through life. The main goal during this stage of life is to learn as much as one can. To achieve this we give up all the comforts and pleasures of life and concentrate only on our studies. This training is like a ride in a hot air balloon. To go up you need to get rid of all unnecessary baggage and just carry what is absolutely essential. The student learns to control all his/her senses (taste, smell, touch, vision and hearing) and the pleasures experienced through them.

How does uncontrolled 'Desire' lead to 'Destruction'

How do we develop extreme liking, weakness or attachment for objects and people? How does this lead to destruction?

**ध्यायतो विषयान् पुंसः संगः तेषु उपजायते |
संगात् संजायते कामः कामात् क्रोधो अभिजायते ||**

**क्रोधात् भवति संमोहः संमोहात् स्मृतिविभ्रमः
स्मृतिभ्रंशाद् बुद्धिनाशः बुद्धिनाशात् प्रणश्यति ||**

Bhagavad Gitā, II:62, 63

***When we constantly think about an object or a person,
we develop an attachment (for that object or person).***

***Out of that attachment arises a desire
(to possess that object or person).***

When this desire is not fulfilled, we develop anger.

***Anger destroys our memory of past experiences
and prevents us from thinking clearly.***

The higher intellect (and the capacity to make decisions -

'good & bad', 'moral & immoral',

'ethical & unethical) is destroyed.

This ultimately leads to our destruction

(Of the individual, community or nation) and we perish.

Bhagavad Gitā, II:62, 63

We can see a lot of common people and even world leaders and famous people experiencing this outcome.

This does not mean that later on in life, during the next stage - *Gruhasthāshram* (house holder), we do not enjoy good food or relationship between husband and wife but we try not to become slaves of these enjoyments and forget our duties or the ultimate goal in life. The training during *Brahmacharyāshram* helps adults to control all their senses at appropriate times and set a good example for their children.

“Brahmacharya...means not suppression of one or more senses but complete mastery over them all...

Conquest means using them as my slaves.”

M. K. Gāndhi in ‘Bapu’s Letters to Mira’, p.257

In computer jargon, it is ‘garbage in, garbage out’. If we put in wrong data, the computer will give us wrong results. We cannot expect anything good to come out of our mouths and in our actions if we put a lot of ‘garbage’ in our minds through our eyes and ears (watching certain movies, listening to certain music, reading trashy books, or watching videos, etc).

“Brahmacharya.....is purity not merely of body (actions) but of both speech and thought also.”

M. K. Gāndhi in ‘Harijan’: February 29, 1936

Other Characteristics of an Ideal Person

These values are mentioned in following shlok-s in Bhagavad Gitā:

***अभयं सत्वसंशुद्धिः ज्ञानयोगव्यवस्थितिः ।
दानं दमश्च यज्ञश्च स्वाध्यायः तप आर्जवम् ॥१६:१॥***

***Abhayam, Satv-shamshuddhihi, gnān yog vyavasthithi;
Dānam, damah, cha Yagnah, cha svādhyāyah, tapa,
ārvavam.***

Bhagavad Gitā XVI:1

4. Fearless (अभयं *Abhayam*). A truly evolved person is fearless and is able to think clearly, calmly and make good decisions under most difficult circumstances.

5. Purity of thoughts (सत्त्वसंशुद्धि *Satv-shamshuddhi*). Our thoughts influence our speech and actions. If we remove impurities of the mind (mentioned later), our speech and actions will follow.
6. Established in the 'Yog of knowledge' (ज्ञानयोगव्यवस्थिति *Gnān Yog Vyavasthiti*). Decisions and actions are based on the knowledge about morals & ethics, what is right & wrong (from the scriptures).
7. Charity (दान *Dān*). People and institutions doing work for the good of the society are supported by generous donations of money and time.
8. Restraint (दम *Dama*) of all the pleasures derived from the five senses. If this is not practiced, the sensual pleasures will control all our actions and take us away from noble causes.
9. Personal sacrifice (यज्ञ *Yagna*). The 'fire ceremony' or ritual is performed by a lot of people without understanding the deeper meaning behind it. Desires for personal pleasures, power, prestige, possessions, etc. are given up as a sacrifice in the holy fire for the good of the family, community, country and the world. All our negative tendencies are symbolically destroyed in the sacred fire. This reinforces # 8.
10. Study of scriptures (स्वाध्याय *Svādhāy*). Regular study of scriptures is necessary for reminding us of our path of spiritual development and to keep us on the right track.
11. Disciplined and sincere effort (तप *Tap*) is necessary on this difficult journey.
12. Honesty (आर्जव *Ārjav*) in all the activities of life. It is related to 'Integrity' when your relatives, friends, co-workers, etc. have confidence in you, your work and are able to depend on you.

**अहिंसा सत्यम् अक्रोधः त्यागः शान्तिः अपैशुनम् ।
दया भूतेषु अलोलुप्त्वं मार्दवं हिः अचापलम् ॥१६:२॥**

***Ahimsā, Satyaam, akrodhah, tyāgah, shāntiḥ, apaishunam;
Dayā bhuteshu, aloluptvam, mārdavam, hri, achapalam.***

Bhagavad Gitā XVI:2

Truth (सत्यं *Satyam*) & Non-violence (*Ahimsā*) have been dealt with before.

13. Without Anger (अक्रोध *Akrodh*) because anger interferes with making ‘Good’ decisions. Actions undertaken with the feeling of anger may lead to disastrous results. Learn to speak up without anger when it comes to your own self-respect (*ātma sanmān rakshan*), your family’s, friend’s or community’s welfare, honor & protection of the country or Dharma.

14. Renunciation (त्याग *Tyāg*) of ‘fruits’ (results) of all activities. Worrying about the results of our actions can make us very anxious and may paralyze us if we are afraid of failure. We have control only over our intentions of an action and how we carry out the job but not the results.

15. Peace of mind (शान्ति *Shānti*) is also necessary for good decisions and behavior.

16. Straight forward nature, truthful & pleasant speech (अपैशुनम् *Apaishunam*). Our speech can make or break a relationship. Harm done by a wrong word can last a life time.

17. Love and tenderness towards all living creatures (दया *Dayā*).

**दया धर्मका मुल है
पाप मुल अभिमान**

Compassion is the basis of Dharma

Arrogance (haughtiness) is the root cause of sin (Adharma)

Empathy is the ability to move beyond ourselves, to identify with others, to walk in another's shoes. This quality is important whether you are a doctor, lawyer, politician or a janitor. It will set you apart from many others. It is part of ‘Universal Love’ for all.

18. Refrain from excessive indulgence in activities for personal pleasure (*Aloluptvam*).

19. Gentle behavior and modesty (*Mārdavam*) in speech and actions towards all.

20. Remorse for any inappropriate actions, speech or thoughts (*Hri*).
21. Unnecessary speech and / or movements of the limbs (*Achapalam*) are considered a weakness.

**तेजः क्षमा धृतिः शौचं अद्रोहः न अतिमानिता ।
भवन्ति संपदं दैवीम् अभिजातस्य भारत ॥१६:३॥**

***Tejah, kshamā, dhrutihi, shaucham, adhrohah,
na atimānitā;
Bhavanti sampadam daivim abhijātasya Bharata.***

Bhagavad Gitā, XVI. 3.

22. Person with divine qualities has a special ‘glow’ on her face and has lots of energy for selfless service (*Tejah*).
23. Forgiveness (*I*) for faults of other people. This quality helps us remain calm under most insulting or humiliating circumstances. The ability to forgive others is considered very important quality - more than physical beauty, good character and knowledge:

नरस्य आभरणं रूपं रूपस्य आभरणं गुणः ।
गुणस्य आभरणं ज्ञानं ज्ञानस्य आभरणं क्षमा ॥

***A man’s physical appearance is like an ornament.
Good qualities are like an ornament of the beautiful body.
Knowledge is an ornament of a person with good qualities.
But the ability to forgive is an ornament
of people with all of the above;
(physical beauty, good qualities and knowledge).***

Subhāshitani

24. Steadfast (*Dhruti*), a quality to maintain a calm mind and steady course of action once a decision is made without getting depressed or paralyzed by set backs.
25. Purity (*Shaucha*) of thoughts and cleanliness of the body, clothes & surroundings.
26. Absence of any desire to harm anyone or cheat (*Adhrohah*) leads to non-violent behavior.

27. Devoid of excessive pride (*Na-atimānitā*). A person who does not feel insulted or hurt on slightest pretext.

Life according to these values and virtues is essential for smooth and efficient functioning of the society to bring about peace and prosperity in the world. They are also necessary prerequisites for our progress on the evolutionary path of becoming an 'Ideal Person' and experiencing the 'Divine' or 'Self Realization'.

Weaknesses

Bhagavad Gitā (Chap. XVI.4) also recommends removal of following impurities or weaknesses of the mind:

**दम्भो दर्प अभिमान च क्रोधः पारुष्यं एव च ।
अज्ञानं च अभिजातस्य पार्थ संपदं आसुरिम् ॥१६:४॥**

***Dumbhah, darpah, abhimānah, cha krodhah,
pārushyam, eva cha
Agnānan cha abhijātasya Pārtha sampadam āsurim.***

Bhagavad Gitā, XVI:4

1. Hypocrisy (*Damabh*), pretending to be better than one really is.
2. Arrogance (*Darp*) of knowledge, color of the skin, family, wealth, physical strength, etc. It also includes hostile intention to take revenge, condescending behavior, or self-centered person.

**मा कुरु धनजनयौवनगर्व हरति निमेषात्कालः सर्वम्।
मायामयमिदमखिलं हित्वा ब्रह्मपदं त्वं प्रविश विदित्वा॥**

***Do not be proud of wealth, about people you know
(status in society)
or youth (health, physical appearance, strength, etc.);
They are all taken away in no time.
Give up all theses illusions (temporary attributes)
and enter the state of Brahman (bliss) after knowing this.***

3. False or excessive pride, hostile intention (*Abhiman*).
4. Anger (*Krodh*).
5. Bullying nature (*Pārushyam*).
6. Ignorance (*Agnānam*) about one's place in the universe and relationship with other creatures, someone who thinks he is the most important person in the world or lack of knowledge about 'Self'.

These six are considered as devilish (*Āsuric*) characteristics or impurities of the mind. Everyone has to try and remove these from their personality.

Following three characteristics that may lead to a person's downfall:

**त्रिविधं नरकस्येदं द्वारं नाशनमात्मनः ।
कामः क्रोधस्तथा लोभस्तस्मादेतत्त्रयं त्यजेत् ॥**

***(Intense selfish) desires, anger and greed
are the three gates to Hell that will destroy a person.
That's why one should give them up.***

Bhagavad Gitā, XVI:21

Four Stages of Life

Fortunately for us our wise sages of ancient times had come up with a master plan for the whole life so that people will not lose sight of what they were supposed to do through different stages of life. There was no reason to have midlife crisis on 40th or 50th birthday or when children leave home for the University. Life was divided in four stages or *Āshram*-s and definite duties ascribed to each stage.

1. *Brahmacharyāshram*

The first stage of life is called *Brahmacharyāshram*. One of the meanings of Brahmacharya is to search for the ultimate ‘Truth’. It is up to the age of 25 years. The main goal of this stage is to gain knowledge and practice self-discipline (*Dama*). All pleasures derived from our senses (taste, touch, smell, hearing, & seeing) are given up so that the student can concentrate on his/her studies. This - giving up of the pleasures of senses - is called *Pratyāhār* (प्रत्याहार) in Sanskrit. All the practices recommended under Brahmacharyāshram are performed in *Vānprasthāshram* and *Sanyāshram* too.

यदा संहरते च अयं कूर्मो अङ्गानि इव सर्वशः ।
इन्द्रियाणि इन्द्रियार्थेभ्यः तस्य प्रज्ञा प्रतिष्ठता ॥२:५८॥

***Just as a tortoise (in face of danger) withdraws all his limbs
(under his shell),***

***A wise person withdraws all his senses from the objects
that gives (temporary) pleasure.***

Bhagavad Gitā, 2:58

Another example is that of a moth being attracted by a flame (pleasures of the sense organs), starts to circle around it (thinks about it constantly), gets closer and closer to the flame (wants more and more of that pleasure) and ultimately burns itself alive (something like a drug overdose).

**प्रजहाति यदा कामान् सर्वान् पार्थ मनोगतान् ।
आत्मनि एव आत्मना तुष्टः स्थितप्रज्ञः तदा उच्यते ॥**

***To become (a person focussed on a noble goal)
abandon all (selfish) desires (for pleasure)
arising in the mind
And feel completely satisfied in your self
(without fulfilling any desires and
Stop running after pleasures of senses)***

Bhagavad Gitā, II:55

**दुःखेषु अनुद्विग्नमनाः सुखेषु विगतस्पृहः ।
वीतरागभयक्रोधः स्थितधीः मुनिः उच्यते ॥**

***Do not get depressed (or paralyzed) by failure (or adversity)
Or run after pleasure (success or glory).
Act without attachment (for a particular result),
Or fear, and anger.
Be like a profoundly wise person with a steady intellect.***

Bhagavad Gitā II:56

**युक्ताहारविहारस्य युक्तचेष्टस्य कर्मसु ।
युक्तस्वप्नावबोधस्य योगो भवति दुःखहा ॥**

***Those who want to avoid painful and adverse (unpleasant)
effects (later on in life)
should eat appropriate diet
(nutritious & just enough calories),
And be disciplined in recreation, work and sleep.***

Bhagavad Gitā VI:17

Other Qualities of a good student

1. Ability to focus on what the teacher is teaching.
2. Develop a peaceful mind.
3. Habit of hard work.
4. Planning activities of the day, week, month, year and long term.

The student devotes her/his time and energies to studying. In the olden days, young children (boys and girls) used to live with their Guru or teacher. The guru and his wife would look after them, feed them, and teach them - treat them the same as their own children. The students had to memorize all the knowledge taught by the *Guru* and recite it when asked. There were no books, no fancy libraries, TV, computers or internet. This period in life was devoted to learning scriptures, literature, arts, math, and sciences.

Importance of Education & Knowledge

**विद्वान् प्रशस्यते लोके विद्वान् गच्छति गौरवम् ।
विद्यया लभ्यते सर्वं विद्या सर्वत्र पूज्यते ॥**

चाणक्यनीति, ८:२०

***A knowledgeable and educated person is honored
in society.***

***One can obtain almost everything through knowledge
(and skills).***

***Educated person receives accolades
and reverence everywhere.***

Chanakya Niti, 8:20

Education is considered to be the best wealth to possess because:

**न चोरहार्यं न च राजहार्यं न भ्रातृभाज्यं न च भारकारि ।
व्यये कृते वर्धत एव नित्यं विद्याधनं सर्वधनप्रधानम् ॥**

***Of all the different kinds of wealth one can possess,
education is the best.***

No one can steal it nor can it be taken away by the king.

Brothers cannot claim it.

It does not become a burden on the educated person.

Knowledge increases by sharing it with others.

That is why knowledge is the best kind of wealth to possess.

Other benefits of knowledge and education are:

**विद्या ददाति विनयं विनयाद्याति पात्रताम् ।
पात्रत्वाद्धनमाप्नोति धनाद्धर्मः ततः सुखम् ॥**

हितोपदेश

True knowledge makes us humble & polite.

***Humility and knowledge makes us eligible
(for work and promotion).***

Through all these we can earn money (acquire wealth).

***With the help of wealth we can support Dharma
(noble efforts).***

This brings happiness (and prosperity to the community).

Hitopadesh

Gift of education is better than feeding a hungry because:

**अन्नदानात् परं दानं विद्यादानमतःपरम् ।
अन्नेन क्षणिका तृप्तिर्यावज्जीवं च विद्यया ॥**

***Giving food to the hungry is a great charity.
Greater than that is education (teaching a skill or trade).
Food can relieve hunger for one day;
But education gives happiness for whole life.***

An educated person wins the respect of everyone.

**स्वगृहे पूज्यते मूर्खः स्वग्रामे पूज्यते प्रभुः ।
स्वदेशे पूज्यते राजा विद्वान् सर्वत्र पूज्यते ॥**

***A fool may be respected in his own home.
A leader of Gram Panchāyat
(five people's governing committee of a village)
is respected in her own village.
A king is respected within his own kingdom.
Whereas, a scholar is respected everywhere.***

Duties of a Student

Mother and father are the first teachers of all children. When he / she starts school the teacher (*Guru*) takes the position of parents. Students respect their *guru* and *Gurupatni* (*Guru's* wife) and follow all their instructions. Every child has to have special respect for them.

**मातृ देवो भव
पितृ देवो भव
आचार्यो देवो भव ॥**

***Mātru devo bhav
Pitru devo bhava
Āchārya devo bhava.***

***Mother, father, and teacher should all be respected
and revered like a God.
(Because they take care of you when you are vulnerable
and educate you in so many essential skills).***

At an appropriate age boys and girls were sent to a *Gurukul* (*Guru* = teacher, *Kul* = family) - boarding school. The *Guru*, his family, and all the students lived a very simple life without any complaints. The students help in various chores including feeding and cleaning guru's cows. They all worked hard, ate simple food, lived a very simple life, and concentrated on their studies. Even princes and sons of rich people were treated the same as other students. They gave up pleasures of all sense organs (taste, touch, smell, etc.). There was great emphasis on developing noble character (becoming an Āryan). This helped the student lead a life of self-discipline. There was no time to think about boyfriend or girlfriend, or worry about 'who will go with me on the Prom night'.

A student is called *Vidyārthi*. In *Sanskrit* and means 'Seeker of knowledge'. *Vidyā* = knowledge and *Artha* = wealth. *Vidyārthi* considers knowledge as her wealth. A good student works hard day and night to gain knowledge. His main focus during this period of life is to study.

Vidur was a very wise Prime Minister who said:

**सुखार्थिनः कुतो विद्या ।
विद्यार्थिनः कुतो सुखम् ॥**

***Sukharthinah kuto Vidyā.
Vidyārthinah kuto sukham.***

***A student who wants fun and pleasure cannot learn
(because he/she cannot pay attention to studies
and have fun too).***

***A good student who wants to learn,
should not run after pleasure.***

Vidur Neeti, in Mahābhābhārat

Chāṇakya goes further and tells us that:

सुखार्थी वा त्यजेत्विद्यां विद्यार्थी व त्यजेत् सुखम् ।

***Someone who is interested in fun and pleasure related
activities should give up studies.***

***One who is interested in serious study should give up
running after pleasure seeking activities.***

Chāṇakyaniti 10:3

A child incurs a lot of debt (ऋण - *Roon*) to parents & teachers for bringing him / her up from pregnancy, childbirth, raising the child, educating him/her, etc. That's why a child should always serve the needs of his/her parents & teachers (within certain limits). When a child can please mother, father & teacher then his duties towards them are fulfilled.

Āchār - Conduct or Practice

Āchār - behavior or conduct in the society is the most important characteristic of a learned person. He / she has to live his / her life according to the morals & ethics learnt from parents and teachers (*Sadāchār* - good conduct).

आचारः प्रथमो धर्मः

आचारः परमो धर्मः

***Living according to Dharma is the top priority (for all).
(It is not enough to just learn about Dharma)***

अथ यत्तपो दानमार्जवमहिंसा सत्यवचनमिति ता अस्य दक्षिणाः ॥ ४ ॥

***Ath yat tapo dānam ārjavam Ahimsā,
Satyaavachanam iti tā asy dakshinā.***

***The practice of disciplined effort, charity, ethical behavior,
nonviolence, and speaking the truth
(by the graduates is the best) Guru dakshinā
(gift to teachers).***

Chhāndogya Upanishad, 3.17.4

How early in life can a child start learning?

In *Mahābhārat*, it is mentioned that once *Shri Krushn* (Shri Krishna) was talking to his pregnant sister, *Subhadra*; about a complicated war strategy (*Chakra Vyuha* or *Padma Vyuha*). It is about how an enemy leader can be trapped by encircling him during a battle. The unborn child in the womb learns this and is able to use it in war when he grows up. Early education starts when an unborn fetus is in the mother's womb. In view of this, pregnant women are advised to listen to positive & uplifting music, read books & stories that teach high morals and ethics and avoid trashy novels or violent TV shows. This practice should be continued not only when the child is growing up but throughout life.

Keep an Open Mind

आ नो भद्राः क्रतवो यन्तु विश्वतः ।

Roog (Rig) Véd, I-89-i

***Let good (noble, helpful) ideas come from the whole world
(all sources).***

Consideration should be given to helpful ideas from all sources and all walks of life with diverse points of views. This does not mean that every advice or idea proposed has to be accepted and put into practice. All suggestions are considered and properly evaluated to see if they are according to *Dharma*, useful to the vast majority of people and what the consequences of following them may be and then decide. Do not let others influence your basic beliefs without your thorough evaluation.

Good Student

***A good student respects his / her teachers, listens attentively
and:***

***यः पठति लिखति पश्यति परिपृच्छती पण्डितान् उपाश्रयपि ।
तस्य दिवाकरकिरणैः नलिनी दलं इव विस्तारिता बुद्धिः ॥***

***A student who studies under a learned teacher -
reads, writes, observes (analyses)
and asks appropriate questions -
develops her / his intelligence like a lotus leaf
under the influence of rays of the sun.***

Importance of Educating Daughters

All young girls are potential mothers and they will be the first ‘*Guru-s*’ (teachers) of their sons and daughters. If they are not educated and cultured they will not be able to raise ‘Noble’ citizens. Both *Roog* (Rig) & *Atharva Véd-s* (ऋग्वेद & अथर्व वेद) recommend that parents should gift their daughters the power of knowledge. When she leaves for her husband’s home parents should give her a dowry of ‘knowledge’.

In ancient India, giving money or gold ornaments on the occasion of a daughter’s marriage as a ‘dowry’ was not a custom. A daughter was educated in basic reading, writing, music, dancing, and the art of home-making. Some of them were very good in math and other subjects. A cultured and well educated young lady was well respected.

Other Advice for Modern Times

Nowadays some studies go on well beyond the age of 25 years, e.g., Medicine. If you decide to enter the next stage of life – *Gruhasthāshram* – before finishing your studies, then you may have to think about all the consequences. One needs to consider his/her individual circumstances and decide. If you look around you may find some 18 or 20 year olds getting married. Talk to them and see how difficult it becomes to study after they start a family. Rarely a supportive husband or wife can make a lot of difference. Usually people are distracted from their studies because of increased responsibilities of family life.

Respect is a feeling of regard and even admiration for yourself and for others; it is being thoughtful and considerate of others. Your body is an instrument. Keep it in good shape - physically, mentally and spiritually. Then it will serve your purpose for many, many years to come. At the same time respect other’s bodies, feelings and ego too.

Responsibility is being accountable, doing our best to meet our commitments, and to keep our word. Know your goal, focus on it, work hard, know what you want to achieve but do not let ‘worry’ about the results paralyze you.

Resilience is an extension of courage. It’s the ability to recover quickly, and to not give up when beset by setbacks and disappointments. All of us will have many difficulties in our lives. Always be strong. Above all, have a good head on your shoulders. Use it under all circumstances. Do not let it fly away in clouds or roll down in the gutter.

Duties of a Teacher

The *Guru's* responsibility was to guide his/her students with love, kindness and affection a thousand times more than that of a father. He has the patience to remove all doubts even if he has to answer the same question a hundred times. The teacher lived by the highest moral, ethical, cultural, and spiritual values and the students learnt these principles by listening, observation, and practicing them in their own life. In the *Védic* tradition, the teacher (*Guru*) did not ask for any money for his services. King and voluntary contributions by the wealthy in the community supported the *Guru*, his family and his *āshram*.

Graduation Speech

The graduation speech by the *Guru* outlines the duties of the next stage of life, the householder (*Gruhashthāshram*). A summary of graduation speech from *Taittiriya Upanishad*, is as follows:

1. Practice what is right. Live according to Dharma.
2. Study the scriptures and teach them too.
3. Live up to the lessons on 'ideals' learnt in the boarding school (*Gurukul*).
4. Let the speech and actions be the same as the ideals accepted by the mind & intellect.
5. Personal sacrifice and disciplined effort are required of the householder.
6. The householder has complete control over his senses.
7. He works for peace, prosperity and security of the family, community and the country.
8. Fire signifies knowledge. Fire in the kitchen is necessary for preparing food. The householder works so that there is food in the house, knowledge in the family and the community.
9. Daily *pujā* (worship) is performed by the family as a reminder of their *Dharma*.
10. Guests are welcomed with warmth and treated generously.
11. Take care of the needs of the community, country, and the world.
12. Having children and bringing them up is a major, time consuming duty of husband & wife.

13. Protection of women, the weak, the elderly, and the country is also the duty of able-bodied adults.

2. *Gruhasthāshram*

According to the ancient tradition, men and women marry around the age of 25, have children, and earn money to support the family and the community. This stage of life is called “*Gruhasthāshram*”. There are many responsibilities associated with this stage of life. It is a time for taking care of elderly parents, raising children and selfless service (*Yagna*) for the society, country and the world at large. Needs of the family are taken care of first and then it is extended to relatives, friends, community, the country and the world.

Family Relations

**परो अपि हितवान् बन्धुः , बन्धुः अपि अहितः परः |
अहितः देहजः व्याधिः , हितम् आरण्यम् औषधम् ||**

हितोपदेश

***The person with whom we have no relation,
but who helps us in our difficult times
is our real relative / friend.
In contrast the person who may be our relative / brother
but who always behaves badly with us should not be
considered our relative / brother.
Just like a disease which is in our own body
does so much harm to us
while the medicinal plant which grows in a forest far off does
so much good to us!***

From *Hitopadesh*

The company we keep will influence our lifestyle. During school years and especially after we leave our parents home for studies or work, our thinking and actions will be influenced by the company we keep. Later on in life, the partner we select will be a major influence. We have no choice in the selection of our parents. But selection of who our friends or life partner is up to us to decide. This will have a great influence on the kind of life we live.

Marriage is a union of two equals. The husband and wife are expected to love and respect each other. No one individual is given more importance over the other. The wife is considered to be *ardhāngini*, meaning the other half, or *sahadharmachārīni*, meaning her husband's partner, guide or friend in living a life according to *Dharma*. The wife also becomes the *Samrāgni*, or queen of the household and has an equal share in performance of religious rites.

***“O wife! Become the queen and take care of everyone
in the family of your husband.”***

Atharva Véd, 14.1.20

Status of Women in Society

Dowry in Marriage

Giving material gifts of gold ornaments, clothes, etc. to a bride or the groom was NOT sanctioned in ancient *Védic* culture.

न कन्यायाः पिता विद्वान् गृहिण्यात् - शुल्कम् अणु-अपि ।
गृहणन् - शुल्कं हि लोभेन स्यान् नरो अपत्यविक्रयी ॥ ३-५१

***No father of a daughter who is knowledgeable
(about Védic Dharma)
should accept even a smallest gift
(from the groom) out of greed
since that is considered to be ‘a sale of his daughter’.***

Manusmruti 3-51

The married couple's main responsibility is to bring up children who have noble (*Āryan*) characteristics and who in turn will become good citizens. *Védic Dharma* also teaches that every woman in the world must be accorded the highest respect and honor, like one's own mother.

***“May the pure life-giving, enlightening woman be respected
as a mother everyday so that she provides us with peace and
eradicates all hatred from the society.”***

Roog (Rig) Véd (ऋग्वेद) 8.18.7

***यत्र नार्यस्तु पूज्यन्ते रमन्ते तत्र देवताः ।
यत्रैतास्तु न पूज्यन्ते सर्वास्तत्राफलाः क्रियाः ।***

***Yatra Nāryastu pujiyante ramante tatra devatāhā
Yatraitāstu na pujiyante sarvāstatrāphalāhā kriyāha***

***Gods rejoice where women are respected.
Nothing succeeds where women are not respected.***

Manu Smruti, 3.56

And

***पितृभिर् मातृभिश् च-एताः पतिभिर् देवैस् तथा ।
पूज्या भूषयितव्याश् च बहुकल्याणम् ईप्सुभिः ॥ ३-५५ ॥***

***Women (of the family) must be honored and respected
by their fathers, brothers, husbands and her brothers-in-law
who like their own welfare.***

Manusmruti 3-55

Suggested Seven Vows of Marriage

During marriage ceremony the couple goes around sacred fire and take seven vows - give seven promises to each other:

1. I will love and take care of you for the rest of our lives. You will be my best friend and companion.
2. We will grow together in physical, emotional and spiritual strength by continuing our studies of the scriptures.
3. I will respect and trust you.
4. We will make all important financial and other decisions together.
5. I will help you in your work to earn money, become prosperous and support our children, elderly in the family, friends and community according to *Dharma*.
6. Live in happiness and harmony together
7. I will treat your relatives with respect as if they are my relatives.

Teaching Discipline to Children

What is 'Discipline'? In life we need a good routine, some control or restraint over our behavior, and an aim to achieve something worthwhile. To achieve these, we need discipline. It is choosing to do something that may be difficult or unpleasant to do but is good for us in the long run.

Why? If we care for our destiny, we need to be careful about what we think. Disciplining our minds and thoughts is the first step for achieving our goals and becomes the key to our success in life.

***"There is nothing so obedient as a disciplined mind and
There is nothing so disobedient as an undisciplined mind."***

Gautam Buddha

How and when to start disciplining a child?

**लालयेत पंचवर्षाणि दशवर्षाणि ताडयेत् ।
प्राप्तेषु षोडशे वर्षे पुत्रे मित्रवदाचरेत् ॥**

***Treat a child up to the age of five
with lots of love and tenderness.***

From five to fifteen years raise a child with strict discipline.

After the age of 16 behave with them as friends.

In the cartoon movie “Kung Fu Panda” a Panda bear goes to learn Kung Fu from a teacher - ‘Yoda’. The martial art of Kung Fu requires a lot of discipline - control over the mind and focus - before a student can become proficient. Panda bear had a great weakness for food. Yoda shows Panda's favorite food - a rice dumpling. As soon as Panda tries to grab the dumpling, Yoda takes it away. This goes on till Panda gets over his weakness. Then only Yoda starts his real training and Panda bear becomes as agile as Yoda. To learn anything worthwhile one has to give up all other desires and focus only on gaining knowledge and training.

Likes & Dislikes

We all have certain activities that we like and some that we don't like. When we avoid activities that are important - like getting up early in the morning - and avoid them, then it is not good for us in the long run. To overcome our strong ‘dislikes’, we may select a project we dislike and are ‘putting it off’; give it a priority and give your best shot.

**सुखदुःखे समे कृत्वा लाभालाभौ जयाजयौ ।
ततो युद्धाय युज्यस्व नैवं पापम् अवाप्स्यसि ॥**

***In this struggle (battle of life, develop equanimity
A balanced mind)
by accepting pleasure and pain, success and failure
(as part of life).***

***Give your full attention to the effort
and then you will not incur any sin
(feeling of guilt or sadness).***

Bhagavad Gitā II, 38

We lose our capacity to make good decisions when we are under stress. Equanimity is very important, especially when we are dealing with some stressful situations.

We also need to develop tolerance for unpleasant conditions like hot and cold, taste for certain healthy foods and even unpleasant people.

**मात्रास्पर्शाः तु कौन्तेय शीतोष्णसुखदुःखदाः ।
आगमापायिनो अनित्याः तान् तितिक्षस्व भारत ॥**

***O descendant of King Bharat (Prince Arjun),
when our sense organs come in contact with objects,
we experience heat or cold.
These sensations give us the feeling of pleasure or pain.
They have a beginning and an end. They are not permanent.
Be patient and bear with them.***

Bhagavad Gitā II, 14

Worry

Most of us think about our past failures and worry about the future. It is good to remember following advice:

Past is dead - you can't change it.

The Future is unknown - don't worry too much about it.

You have control only over the present,

plan well, work hard & execute your plans.

Everything will (hopefully) work out eventually.

Swami Chinmayanand

3. *Vānaprasthāshram*

The next stage of life is “*Vānaprasthāshram*”. This starts at the age of 50 years and goes up to 75. Main goal of this stage is *Svādhyāy* or serious and regular study of scriptures and preparing for the ultimate goal in life - which is union (*Yog*) with God or *Brahman* (*Moksha*). One can devote more time for community service - again without expecting anything (money, prestige, position, or power) in return for the services. Gradually all unnecessary material things and activities are given up, life is simplified, and most time is devoted to *Svādhyāy* (self-study) or *Sevā* or service of community.

4. *Sanyāsāshram*

The last stage of life is called “*Sanyāsāshram*” - when we give up all desires and live like a homeless monk. Anyone can enter this stage at any time in life - like Gautam Buddha did during *Gruhasthāshram*. He left his wife, son, palace, and kingdom to find the real meaning of life. *Sanyāsi*-s live under a tree on the outskirts of a town or in a temple, or in a jungle, and meditate. They do not participate in activities of the family or society. The main goal is to practice *Tyāg* (giving up or abandoning all possessions & pleasures). This is developed through *Vairāgya* (moving away from the desires for worldly pleasures and activities).

Rooshi Bhartruhari wrote 100 verses titled *Vairāgyashatakam* in which he writes that the pleasures derived from our five senses are as temporary as a wave in the ocean. We are worried about paying the tax when we are rich, about losing power or status when we are powerful, losing our life to disease and death when we are old. Renunciation of all these attachments is the only path to long lasting peace and happiness.

There are six types of renunciations that one needs to be practiced in life:

1. Remaining the same during adversity or failure and
2. In success or prosperity (giving up personal attachment to success and failure, praise or criticism, calamity or good fortune).
3. Giving up selfish desire to gain something out of any *Yagna* (rituals, visit to temples or pilgrimage).
4. *Dāna* - giving money or help to deserving without expecting anything in return.
5. Not expecting or asking for help from son, daughter, wife, relatives or friends.
6. Giving up all desires and withdrawing from the world *Sanyāsa*.

5. Death

We are all afraid of ‘Death’ even though no one is exempt from this final outcome. Some do not even want to think or talk about it. *Védic Dharma* not only teaches us how to live our life but also what to do at the time of death. Since death is inevitable for all, it is better to accept it and know what happens at the time of death. This does not mean we have to fold our arms, sit down, and do nothing when we are sick.

As we attain a certain age, or if we are suffering from certain terminal diseases, we can start preparing for the final transition – ‘death’. Contact all friends and relatives to ‘thank’ them for all that they have done for you and beg for forgiveness for any pain or suffering caused by you during your lifetime and forgive them all. Pay off all financial debts and update legal documents like ‘will’, ‘living will’, ‘power of attorney’, etc. Start distributing the wealth and possessions among relatives and charitable organizations. Assign duties to close relatives about what they should do after you are gone. Breathing techniques (*Prāṇāyām*) and meditation are worth learning and practicing regularly when we are in good health so that we can relax when the end is near.

**जातस्य हि ध्रुवो मृत्युः ध्रुवं जन्म मृतस्य च ।
तस्मादपरिहार्येऽर्थे न त्वं शोचितुमर्हसि ॥२:२७॥**

***Jātasya hi dhruvo mrutyuhu dhruvam janm mrutasya ch
Tasmād aparihāryérthé n twam shochitum arhasi.***

***“Death is certain for all those who are born
and rebirth is certain for all those who die.”***

Bhagawad Gitā, 2:27

Following prayer is addressed to Lord *Shiv* - also known as *Shankar* (one who gives His blessings) and one who has three eyes. The third eye in the center of his forehead represents ‘wisdom’ - distinguishing right from wrong - and ‘spiritual enlightenment’. He gives spiritual knowledge and also blessings. To overcome the fear of death, repetition of following *Mahāmrutyunjay* (victory over fear of death) *Mantra*, understanding and accepting its meaning is recommended:

**ॐ त्र्यम्बकं यजामहे सुगन्धिं पुष्टिवर्धनम् ।
उर्वारुकमिव बन्धनात् मृत्योर्मुक्षीय मामृतात् ॥**

***ॐ Tryambakam yajāmahé sugandhim pushtivardhanam
Urvārukameev bandhanāt mrutyormukshiy māmrutāt.***

***Om. O Lord Shiva, one with three eyes
(third eye signifying wisdom),
who is full of sweetness and who supports all life,
Just as a ripe cucumber is separated from its bondage
(to the vine, help me move away from my attachments to
relatives, friends and pleasures of this world);
Liberate me from (the fear of) death and take me towards
immortality (permanent bliss).***

It is our very strong desire to ‘enjoy life’ or be with our loved ones and fear of the unknown that keeps us from accepting death. Just as a ripe cucumber has to be separated from its vine, O, God please help me cut off my ties (attachment) to the pleasures of life, this physical body and to my relatives.

The process of dying is called “*Mahāprasthān*” or a ‘the great journey’. Dying is like ‘going off to sleep and waking up in a different environment’ or a different world. At the time of death, the soul (*Jivātmā*) leaves the physical body. It experiences incomparable peace and love, a feeling of being immortal, indestructible and perfect in every way. The soul (*Jivātmā*) carries all the unresolved fruits of actions (*Karma*), desires and impressions of experiences (*Vāsanā*-s) that the body had in life. These determine the circumstances for the next birth. We are born again in a family and circumstances to fulfill our desires and resolve our *Karma*-s.

Four Pillars of the Society

The Caste System

The ancient society in India was divided into four groups according to their capabilities, aptitudes, education, personal effort (*sāadhanā*), and function they performed in the society. These were like the four pillars in four corners of a building supporting a roof overhead. All four groups were equally important and none was respected more than the other. People were able to move freely amongst the four groups according to their qualities and did not depend on the family they were born in. The greatest and most prolific contributor to poetic & religious literature, *Véd Vyās*, was born to a fisher woman.

***Neither birth, nor initiation, nor descent,
Nor bookish knowledge determines a person's merit.
Only their actual conduct, expressed qualities and virtues
determine one's merit.
There is no superior or inferior caste.***

Shanti Parva, Mahābhārat

This system was called *Varnāshram*. *Varn* in *Sanskrit* means to describe. It means attributes like form, color or quality that describes something. When used for humans it may mean the person's physical and mental ability, education, skills and the function performed in the society. Since there were four categories, this system of classification is also called *Chatur* (four) *Varṇ*. These four were called the Divine *Varṇ*-s.

**ब्राह्मणक्षत्रियविशां शूद्राणां च परंतप ।
कर्माणि प्रविभक्तानि स्वभावप्रभवैर्गुणैः ॥१८:४१॥**

***Brāhmaṇ-kshatriya-visham shudrānām cha Parantap
Karmaāni pravibhaktani svabhāva-prabhaivaihi gunaihi***

***O Parantap (Arjun), the responsibilities (duties)
of Brāhmaṇ-s, Kshatriy-s, Vaishy-s, and Shudr-s
are assigned according to the qualities they are born with.***

Bhagavad Gitā, XVIII.41

1. *Brāhmaṇ-s* (Brahmins)

**शमो दमस्तपः शौचं क्षान्तिरार्जवमेव च ।
ज्ञानं विज्ञानमास्तिक्यं ब्रह्मकर्म स्वभावजम् ॥१८:४२॥**

***Shamah, damah, tapah, shaucham, kshāntiḥ, ārjavam,
eva cha
Gnānam, vijnānam, āstikyam, BrahmKarma svabhāvajam***

***Those with calmness, self-control, disciplined effort,
purity (of mind and body), forgiveness, righteousness,
knowledge, supreme knowledge (about Brahman),
and faith in God are fit for the duties of a Brāhmaṇ
(Brāhmin).***

Bhagavad Gitā, XVIII.42

Brāhmaṇ-s were the intellectuals who became teachers and preachers. They learnt the scriptures and other arts and sciences, spent their lives running residential schools (*Gurukul*-s) and performing religious ceremonies (*Yagna*). Preservation of *Vēdic* traditions and knowledge was their duty. *Brāhmaṇ*-s were very spiritual and lived a simple life following the highest moral and ethical principles to set a good example for the rest of the society. They were supported by the king, the wealthy, and the parents of their students. There was no demand for any fees for their services. Some selected few would seat in the court of the king to advise him on moral and ethical issues.

2. *Kshatriy*-s

**शौर्यं तेजो धृतिर्दाक्ष्यं युद्धे चाप्यपलायनम् ।
दानमीश्वरभावश्च क्षात्रं कर्म स्वभावजम् ॥१८:४३॥**

***Shauryam, tejah, dhrutihi, dākshyam yuddhe
cha api apalāyanam
Dānam, ishvaryabhāvah cha kshātram Karma svabhāvjam***

***Kshatriy-s are brave, (have) powerful personality,
(can) make firm decisions,
(have) ability to fight in war,
(do) not run away from the battle field,
generous, have great self-confidence and royal behavior.***

Bhagavad Gitā, XVIII.43

Kshatriy-s were physically strong, well-trained in the art of warfare, and use of weapons. One of them would become the king. In the days of king *Bharat*, the ruler was selected on the basis of his knowledge and capabilities. The king's primary responsibility was to protect the population, provide for necessities of life like food, water, schools, roads, etc. Other *Kshatriy*-s would be in the army.

3 &4. Vaishy-s & Shudr-s

**कृषिगौरक्ष्यवाणिज्यमं वैश्यकर्म स्वभावजम् ।
परिचर्यात्मकं कर्म शूद्रस्यापि स्वभावजम् ॥१८:४४॥**

***Krushhi-gaurakshy-vanijyam vaishy-Karma svabhāvajam
Parichayrātmakam Karma shudrasyāpi svabhāvjam***

***Agriculture, taking care of cows, and trade are the
responsibilities of Vaishy-s.
Service is the duty of Shudr-s.***

Bhagavad Gitā, XVIII.44

The third category was *Vaishy-s* who were farmers, businessmen, and other trades people. The financial welfare of the society depended on them. *Shudra-s* were assigned to serve above three groups because of qualities of their nature.

"There is no Védic scriptural sanction for any act of cruelty or oppression or unfair discrimination based on anyone's birth. Birth-based discrimination and cruel treatment of individuals and families which developed in Hindu society over time as socially sanctioned practices are in gross violation of ancient Hindu teachings and philosophy. Many people that revere and owe allegiance to our ancient Dhārmic teachings and philosophy have suffered over the years as a result of such discriminatory practices. Such suffering continues even today, despite the law of the land and enlightened social and religious leaders having continued to make, over the centuries, major and effective contributions to diminish the depth and extent of these discriminatory practices, which have nothing to do with Hindu Dharma."

Swami Dayānand Saraswati

The fourth division was called *Shudr*-s. They did all the hard jobs requiring unskilled labor and some very unpleasant ones. They disposed off dead animals and removed garbage. Gradually they became the untouchables because of the type of work they did and were dominated by other castes. Many reformers have tried to improve their lot and now it is illegal to discriminate on the basis of caste in India. One of the Presidents of independent India - highest position in the Government - was a *Shudr*.

Avarna

There is a fifth group of people who do not fit in with any of the four groups above and it is called - '*Avarna*' - or Non-Divine. These people do not follow the *Dharma* or rules of the society. They are the lawless aggressors who kill, earn money by illegal means, cheat, give and take bribes, are drug dealers and sex traffickers.



Four Paths

***“Each soul is potentially divine.
The goal is to manifest this divinity within
by controlling nature, external and internal.
Do this either by work (Karma yog),
or worship (Bhakti yog),
or psychic control (Rāj yog),
or philosophy (Gnān yog)
by one, or more, or all of these - and be free.
This is the whole religion.
Doctrines or dogmas or rituals or books or temples or forms
are but secondary details.”***

Swami Vivékānand

The main goal of life is to experience the divinity within. To achieve this union or *Yog* with the supreme, four major paths are prescribed. We have the choice of selecting a path depending on our physical, mental, intellectual, and spiritual development, aptitude, opportunities in life, etc. One can follow any one or a combination of more than one ways to achieve our goal. Ultimately all paths end up in the same place. The values described in Ch. 8 are common to all the paths and have to be practiced by all.

Four paths are:

1. *Bhakti Yog* – path of devotion
2. *Karma Yog* – path of action
3. *Gnān Yog* – path of knowledge
4. *Rāj Yog* – path of Meditation

One may meditate in the morning, go to work in the afternoon, stop over for a *Bhajan* (devotional song) session or a temple in the evening, and read scriptures before going to bed, all in one day.

1. *Bhakti Yog*

Is the path of love and devotion for a personal God. Mind and emotions play predominant role in *bhakti*. This is the path of total surrender to God. God can be imagined as a mother, father, friend, child, wife, or husband. Mirabai, a queen, gave up her family, a life of luxury, and got completely immersed in devotion to *Shri Krushn* (Krishna) as if He was her husband. In the end she was prepared to take poison rather than give up her devotion to *Shri Krushn*. The mind is focussed on God as if He/She is a living person, all selfish desires are given up and a state of peaceful existence is reached.

Nine varieties of devotional activities are described in *Bhāgavat Purāṇ*:

1. *Shravaṇ* - listening to scriptures, *bhajan*-s (devotional songs), etc.
2. *Kirtan* - singing *bhajans*, *shlok*-s, etc.
3. *Smaran* – remembering and recalling holy names e.g. *Vishnusahasranām* (thousand names of God).
4. *Pāda sévan* – service at the feet of Lord in a temple
5. *Archanā* – ritual *pujā*
6. *Vandanā* – prostration in front of a *Murti*
7. *Dāsy* – being a servant of God. Cleaning floors or serving food in a temple is a good example.
8. *Sākhy* – intimate friendship with God.
9. *Ātm-nivédana* – total and continuous surrender to God or *Samādhi* merging with God.

Temple Worship

In the *Védic* period there were no temples. Temples were built later on and became centers for those who want to follow the path of *Bhakti Yog*. Ideally they were also meant to be centers for education, music, classical dance, health care, and other social programs. Some other views about temple worship are as follows:

Your heart is the temple where God should be enshrined.

***Your good thoughts are the flowers,
your good words the hymns,
your good deeds, rituals and love is the offering.***

Mata Amritanandamayi Ma

Kerala-based hugging saint

Go not to the temple to put flowers upon the feet of God,

***First fill your own house with
the Fragrance of love and kindness.***

Go not to the temple to light candles before the altar of God,

***first remove the darkness of sin, pride and ego,
from your heart...***

Go not to the temple to bow down your head in prayer,

***first learn to bow in humility before your fellow men,
and apologize to those you have wronged.***

***Go not to the temple to pray on bended knees,
first bend down to lift someone who is down-trodden.***

And strengthen the young ones. Not crush them.

Go not to the temple to ask for forgiveness for your sins,

First forgive from your heart those who have hurt you!

Ravindranath Tagore

2. Karma Yog

The literal meaning of *Karma* is action. Scriptural meaning of *Karma* also includes what precedes the action (intentions behind the action), the act – how it is performed and what means are used; and what follows the action (consequences of that action - *Karmaphal*). Every thought, word, and act has a ripple effect. All good thoughts, words, and actions have good outcomes. This is the law of *Karma*. We may not get the result that we were expecting or at the time when we were expecting it. That is beyond our control. We only have control over our thoughts, speech, and action – not on the result. *Karma* (action) becomes *Karma Yog* when the action is performed without any desire for selfish gain, the activity is performed according to *Dharma* (truthfully, without harming anyone, etc.), without anxiety for the result, and all credit for the outcome is offered to God (*Paramātmā*) in all humility. It is a discipline that helps to draw the mind away from our own bodies and leads towards others in need and towards God.

The most frequently quoted *Shlok* on *Karma Yog* from *Bhagavad Gitā* says:

**कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते मा फलेषु कदाचन ।
मा कर्मफलहेतुर्भूर्मा ते सङ्गोऽस्त्वकर्मणि ॥२:४७॥**

***Karmāñyév adhikārah té mā phaléshu kadāchan
Mā Karma-phal-hetur-bhuhu mā té sangah astu aKarmañi***

***Performance of action is (our) only right.
(We) may not get the fruits (results that we had expected or
when we had expected).***

***Do not work for the fruits of action.
Do not keep company of inaction either
(not performing action is not an option).***

Bhagavad Gitā, II.47

Other *Shlok*-s on *Karma Yog* are:

**यः तु इन्द्रियाणि मनसा नियम्य आरभते अर्जुन ।
कर्मैन्द्रियैः कर्मयोगं असक्तः सः विशिष्यते ॥३:७॥**

***Yah tu indriyāṇi manasā niyamya ārbhaté, Arjun
Karmaéndriyaihi Karmayogam asaktah vishishyaté***

***Whoever initiates actions after controlling
all his sense organs with his mind
(getting over his likes and dislikes for people,
activities, and selfish desires)
and without attachment (to the results), succeeds.***

Bhagavad Gitā, III.7

**नियतं कुरुकर्म त्वं कर्म ज्यायो हि अकर्मणः ।
शरीरयात्रापि च ते न प्रसिद्धेत् अकर्मणः ॥३:८॥**

***Niyatam kuru Karma tvamKarma jyāyo hee aKarmanah
Sharirayātrā api cha té na prasiddhyét aKarmanah***

***Always perform (your) prescribed duty.
Action is better than inaction.
Even maintenance of (physical) body
is not possible without action.***

Bhagavad Gitā, III.8

**योगस्थः कुरु कर्माणि संगमं त्यक्त्वा धनंजय ।
सिद्धसिद्धोः समो भूत्वा समत्वं योग उच्यते ॥**

***Dhananjay (Prince Arjun), focus your full attention
On achieving your final goal
(of achieving union with the Supreme).
Remove the thought (worry) of 'winning glory' or 'defeat'
and stay focussed (on the battle ahead).
This equanimity is called Yog.***

Bhagavad Gitā : II, 48

Equanimity of mind is emphasized here for achieving the best result of all our actions (projects). Our minds get agitated because of our likes & dislikes for the type of work we have to do, the colleagues involved and worry about the end result (success or failure). Let our focus be on our final goal of becoming a noble individual and union with the *Brahman*.

Evaluate every action. Consider your own intentions behind the action and the means used in performing the action. 'Action' is good if the intention is without any selfish motive and methods used do not harm others. We have a choice in the selection of our thoughts and actions. 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. If we do something for others with good intentions and without expecting anything in return, good things will eventually happen to us too. We do not have any control over when or what the consequences will be. It is essential that we analyze our intentions continuously, do our best, work hard, perceive, and leave the results to Him.

***“In regard to every action one must know
the result that is expected to follow,
the means there to, and the capacity for it.
He who, being thus equipped, is without desire for the result
and is yet wholly engrossed in the due fulfillment
of the task before him,
is said to have renounced the fruits of his action.”***

M. K. Gāndhi

Creating our Destiny

***अथो खल्वाहुः काममय एवायं पुरुष इति
स यथाकामो भवति तत्क्रतुर्भवति
यत्क्रतुर्भवति तत्कर्म कुरुते
यत्कर्म कुरुते तदभिसंपद्यते***

***Atho khalvāhuhu kāmamay evāyam purush eeti
sa yathākāmo bhavati tatkraturbhavati
yatkraturbhavati tatKarma kuruté
yatKarma kuruté tad-abhisampadhyaté.***

***We become what we desire for.
Our strong desire is the basis for our decisions.
As our decisions are, so are our actions.
We get results according to our actions.
Thus our desires and actions create our destiny.***

Bruhadāranyaka IV. 4.5

***Keep your thoughts POSITIVE
(without anger, jealousy, revenge, etc.)
because your thoughts become your WORDS.
Keep your words POSITIVE
because your words become your BEHAVIOR.
Keep your behavior POSITIVE
because your behavior becomes your HABITS.
Keep your habits POSITIVE,
because your habits become your VALUES.
Keep your values POSITIVE,
because values become your DESTINY.***

Mahatma Gandhi

Karma Yog (selfless actions, service) is a way of life. It purifies the mind by removing strong, deep selfish desires (*vāsanā*-s) and helps improve concentration in meditation. Practicing what we learn from scriptures and *Guru*-s in everyday life is very important.

***आचारः परमो धर्मः आचारः परमं तपः ।
आचारः परमं ज्ञानम् आचारात् किं न साध्यते ॥***

***Living a life according to scriptural teachings
is the supreme 'Dharma'.
It is the best practice & sacrifice.
It is also the supreme knowledge.
What cannot not be achieved by noble conduct?
(Everything can be achieved through actions
according to Dharma).***

Subhāshitāni

"Truth is high, higher still is truthful living!"

Guru Nanak Devji

We all want to be happy and one very practical and brief advice is:

"Happiness depends on what you can give.

Not on what you get"

Swami Chinmayananda

Our duties are classified in to:

Nitya Karma - everyday responsibilities or *Kartavya Karma* - these Duties have to be performed by all. Taking bath, prayer, study of scriptures, professional work, chores at home, etc. Overcome likes & dislikes for these duties and perform them diligently.

Kāmya Karma - desire prompted actions (for personal gain). They are optional, like buying a fancy car, a big mansion, etc. These desires are optional.

Nishiddha (prohibited, unacceptable) *Karma* - when any action is performed by immoral, or illegal means (*Adharma*) or is harmful to the individual who performs it or others, it impedes his/her evolution.

Our basic desires like satisfying thirst, hunger, sex, shelter etc. are common to most individuals.. Desire for more and more of the same leads to greed, accumulation of material goods and ultimately to moral decay. When we start thinking about the needs of people beyond us and our family, we experience a gradual evolution of our own self into a more caring, loving and happier individual.

3. Gnān (knowledge) Yog

Is the path of intellectual inquiry. The root word *gna* means 'to know'. *Gnān* means knowledge. *Vignān* is used for special knowledge - something more than ordinary knowledge. In scriptures *Vignān* is used for the spiritual wisdom or knowledge about *Brahman* (God).

Like all other paths the person following this path has to practice all the moral values first. Taking this path of *Gnān Yog* without the moral values can be very dangerous. This path is followed at the intellectual level and through study, contemplation, and meditation the ultimate is realized.

We can deny the existence of everything and everyone but we cannot deny the existence of our own self. The intellectual inquiry starts with the questions like “Who am I?”, “Am I my body, mind, or intellect?”, “What is consciousness?”, “What makes me aware of the world around me?”, etc.

There are three steps in acquiring this special knowledge:

1. *Shravan* – listening to a *Guru* and reading scriptures.
2. *Manan* – contemplation on what *Guru* and scriptures have taught and on questions like “What is ‘Truth’?”, “Why am I here in this world?”, “What is the ultimate goal in life?”, “How should I lead my life?”, “What is ‘soul’?”, “What happens after death?” etc.
3. *Nididhyāsan* – contemplation on above questions leads to deeper and deeper understanding of mind, ego, and the divine reality (*Brahman*) within all of us. Ultimately it may lead to the destruction of individual ego and ‘Self-realization’ or union with *Brahman* (the universal force).

4. *Rāj Yog*

Is also known as *Astāng* (eight step) *Yog* or *Kriyā Yog*. The goal of *Rāj Yog* is to destroy the ego and develop intense concentration. In the twelfth chapter of *Bhagavad Gitā*, Arjun asks Shri Krushn “Who is better – a devotee who worships a God with a physical form or one who meditates on the formless, absolute God?” Shri Krushn explains that those who can contemplate on a formless, indestructible, changeless God; should follow that path. Those who prefer to worship God as an icon or form (*Murti*) will also experience the same God ultimately. Both these paths lead to the same result in the end if followers live according to highest moral and ethical principles. None is better than the other.

Patanjali has described eight steps in this *Yog* which include:

1. *Yam-s* (restraints) – are nonviolence (*Ahimsā*), truthfulness (*Satya*), control over all senses (*Brahmacharya*), not taking anything that belongs to others (*Aparigraha*).
2. *Niyam-s* (rules or practices) – are cleanliness of body and mind (*Souch*), contentment (*Santosh*), self-control (*Dama*), study of scriptures (*Svādhyāy*), search for God or surrender to God (*Ishwar Pranidhān*).

The first two steps (*Yam-s* & *Niyam-s*) are common requirements for all paths – *Bhakti*, *Karma*, *Gnān*, & *Raj Yog*.

3. *Āsan-s* – *Yog* postures that are now being taught all over the world is a part of this path.
4. *Prāṇāyām* – control of breathing by various exercises and techniques.
5. *Pratyāhār* – is control of senses or reducing input from all sense organs and thoughts about external objects. Detachment from desires to enjoy pleasures derived from taste, touch, sight, sound and smell.
6. *Dhāraṇ* – is preliminary stage of meditation when the mind is trained to withdraw from all senses and concentrate on an idea or object you want to attain. Intense concentration is achieved for a short period of time.
7. *Dhyān* – is the second stage. The mind is still aware of its separate existence from the object of meditation (*Brahman*).
8. *Samādhi* – is the final goal of meditation in *Rāj Yog*. In the final state of meditation the individual loses her/his individual ego and feels one with *Brahman* (God).

Meditation (*Dhyān* ध्यान)

Meditation quiets the mind, reduces stress and helps us make good decisions. It also improves our mental and physical health. Meditation can be helpful in some medical conditions too. The final goal in life '*Moksh*' - liberation from the cycle of birth & death according to ancient Indian philosophy - can also be achieved through meditation.

Our mind wanders in a thousand different directions. In Chapter VI (*Dhyān Yog*) of *Bhagavad Gitā* Arjun asks Shri Krushn:

**चञ्चलहि मनः कृष्ण प्रमाथि बलवत् दृढम् ।
तस्याहं निग्रहं मन्ये वायोरिव सुदुष्करम् ॥६:३४॥**

***Mind is very active and restless, strong and like the wind,
is very difficult to control.***

Bhagavad Gitā, VI:34

Shri Krushn agrees with Arjun and says:

**असंशयं महाबाहो मनो दुर्निग्रहं चलम् ।
अभ्यासेन तु कौन्तेय वैराग्येण च गृह्यते ॥६:३५॥**

***O Arjun, there is no doubt that mind is very hard to control
because it is restless but with continuous study
(of scriptures), regular practice and withdrawing from the
pleasures derived from our sense organs;
the mind becomes quiet and comes under our control.***

Bhagavad Gitā, VI:35

Meditation requires intense concentration - focus, but it is very difficult because our mind wanders. If we try and analyze, we will find that our mind is agitated by our selfish desires. It runs after pleasures derived from our senses. Sometimes we spend a lot of time planning for the future (building 'castles in the air' or *Sankalp*, संकल्प). Following prerequisites are recommended for success in Meditation:

A life according to *Dharma* as mentioned in this book and first two steps of Patanjali's eightfold path are absolutely necessary. It is a very difficult path to follow for most of us and may take many, many births.

Chapter VI of *Bhagavad Gitā* recommends following:

1. Practice everyday what you have learnt in *Brahmacharya Āshram*.
2. All actions are performed without selfish motive and ego centric desires.
3. Devote yourself to gaining the highest knowledge.
4. Develop detachment so that a piece of gold and a stone are looked upon as of the same value.
5. Love all living creatures and treat your friends and enemies in the same manner. Remove all negative feelings and memories of past.

There are many different methods suggested. Following is one of the simple methods.

1. Select a quiet, comfortable spot in your home.
2. Sit in a comfortable seat or on the floor with back, neck and head in one line.
3. Close your eyes.
4. Breathe slowly, inhale and focus on fresh air going in your lungs, pause briefly, and exhale slowly. Slowly reduce the frequency of breaths/minute. Repeat a *Mantra* like *Aum* ॐ.
5. If thoughts start to distract you, gently bring your mind back to focus on breathing.

You can do this early in the morning (4:00 AM or one and a half hours before sun rise), in between two activities or assignments and in the evening. Do it regularly at the same time and consistently. Persevere & you will notice the benefits of meditation.

You may also meditate on a passage or a prayer with a positive message and slowly go over it in your mind, one word at a time so that the meaning of each word sinks into your consciousness. These noble thoughts and principles will guide you during the day. Let these thoughts bring universal love, truthfulness, fearlessness, morals and ethics into your daily living. It will remove all negative tendencies like fear, hate, anger, jealousy, arrogance, greed, revenge, etc. It is said that we slowly become what we meditate on. We may also feel love for all living creatures and turn our attention to serving all of them to bring happiness, good health and prosperity. This is a very slow process that requires a lot of patience and perseverance.

Four *Mahā Vākya*-s (great proclamations)

Following four great statements (*Mahavaky*-s) or *Mantra*-s proclaim the unity of individual *Ātmā* and *Paramātmā* (God) and may be used to contemplate upon. They are selected from four different *Véd*-s which describe *Brahman* (God) and its relation to the individual ‘Soul’ in the most concise manner.

प्रज्ञानम् ब्रह्म ।

Prajñānam Brahm

***The Supreme knowledge
(that goes beyond physics, chemistry, etc.)
is (about) Brahm (Brahman).***

Roog Véd

1. This knowledge is not gained through our senses but is acquired intuitively or in deep meditation.

तत् त्वम् असि ।

Tat tvam asi

That (Brahman) is you (human soul).

Sām Véd

2. That Supreme *Bhrahman* - the universal life force - is the same as the ‘life force’ within you.

अयम् आत्मा ब्रह्म ।

Ayam Ātmā Brahm

My soul is Brahm.

Atharv Véd

3. The soul within me is the same as the *Brahman*.

अहम् ब्रह्मास्मि ॥

Aham Brahmāsmi

I am (my soul is That) Brahman.

Yajur Véd

4. Final declaration or realization is that I am that *Brahman*.

Another *Shlok* to contemplate on is:

**प्रातः स्मरामि हृदि संस्फुरदात्म तत्त्वं
सच्चित् सुखं परमहंसगतिं तुरीयम् ।
यत् स्वप्न जागर सुषुप्तिमवैति नित्यं
तद् ब्रह्म निष्कलमहं न च भूतसंघः ॥**

In the early morning (at dawn)

***I think of the universal energy (God) in my heart
(The energy keeps me alive and the heart pumping).***

I am trying to realize (experience)

the (ultimate) state of (changeless)

***‘Truth, Consciousness & Bliss’, attain Paramahansa status
(someone who has achieved total control over all his senses),***

has gone beyond the three stages

of dream, wakefulness and dreamless deep sleep

(by meditation) and is always in the fourth stage

of super consciousness (Turiyam).

I am that faultless (perfect) Bhrahman

(Consciousness, Energy, God)

and not this (physical body) made up of five inert materials.

Shri Shankarāchārya

We are all looking for 'Permanent Happiness' but it is very elusive. We may feel 'happy' for a short while and then we are back in our usual unsatisfied and unhappy mode. Permanent or long term happiness can be found if we look for it in the right place:

**मोको कहाँ ढूँढ़ें रे बन्दे,
मैं तो तेरे पास में ।**

***'Where are you looking for 'Me', my friend?
I am very close to you (within you).***

**ना तीरथ में ना मूरत में, ना एकांत निवास में ।
ना मंदिर में, ना मस्जिद में, ना काबे कैलाश में ॥**

***I am not in any holy land nor in an Icon, or in solitude.
Not in a Temple nor in a Mosque or in Kaaba (Mecca)
or on Kailash Mountain.***

Sant Kabir

If we reflect upon our ancient scriptures and epics like *Rāmāyaṇ* and *Mahābhārat* and analyze them carefully; we will find lots of suggestions on 'how to achieve this goal'. They teach us 'where' happiness is and 'how' to achieve it by living a life according to '*Dharma*' with the right attitude. Following *Shlok* from *Bhagavad Gitā* is a good example. It not only gives us the goal to achieve but shows the path on how to achieve it:

वीतरागभयक्रोध मन्मया मामुपाश्रिताः ।

बह्वो ज्ञानतपसा पूता मद्भावमागताः ॥ ४:१० ॥

***When we are able to give up the pursuit of pleasures
(of the senses), fear and anger;
Focus our attention and surrender to the 'Higher Power',
Acquire a lot of scriptural knowledge,
become spiritually purified,
Then we can attain permanent residence with Me
(Realize Me, merge with Me or attain Moksh).***

Bhagavad Gitā 4:10

Three *Guṇ*-s (गुण)

There are three main basic characteristics, qualities or attributes (*Guṇ*-s गुण) to describe all our thoughts, speech, and actions. They are called *Satv* (सत्त्व), *Rajas* (रजस), and *Tamas* (तमस). There are no equivalent English words. They may be very roughly translated as good (Divine, god-like), passionate (राक्षस *Rākshas*), and devilish or bad (असुर *Asur*). They are like three primary colors – when they are mixed in different proportions they can make all the other colors. All three *Guṇ* (गुण)-s exist in all of us in different proportions and create millions of different individual and unique personalities.

The other meaning of *Guṇ* (गुण) is rope, a rope that binds our *Ātmā* (soul) down to our body, mind, intellect, and our sense of ego. The spirit (*Ātmā*), the unlimited power, begins to feel the pain and limitations of the physical body because of this bondage.

Knowledge about *Guṇ*-s (गुण) helps us analyze our own personality, determine our own weaknesses, and take corrective action so that each individual characteristic changes from *Tāmasic* (तामसिक) to *Rājasic* (राजसिक) to *Sātvic* *Guṇ* (सात्त्विक गुण). This can be a road map for our evolutionary path for becoming an ideal (noble) citizen of the world (*Āryan*) and Self-realization or *Moksh*. All of us are capable of improving. All of us have all three *Guṇ*-s (गुण) in different proportions in our thoughts, speech, and actions. No one is perfect and everyone can improve & evolve.

1. *Tamas*

Water buffalo, who spends most of its time soaking in mud, is a good example for this category. There is a lot of inertia, little interest in any activity, no ambition, dull and sleepy all the time. All of us are *Tāmasic* when we are born, spending all the time sleeping, eating, and excreting.

People with this tendency are ignorant of spiritual knowledge or higher values. This is described as total darkness (ignorance) in the mind. They arrive at wrong decisions in life because of this ignorance (*avidyā*) and disorganized thinking. *Tāmasic Vrutti* (तामसिक वृत्ति) is the tendency of a person with predominantly *Tamas* (तमस) which includes laziness, carelessness, fear, hostility towards all, and uncaring attitude. It also includes criminal thoughts of breaking laws or rules and violent actions. The color for *Tamas* (तमस) is black.

2. *Rajas* (रजस)

A *rājasic* (राजसिक) person has lots of selfish desires for acquiring worldly goods, ambition for wealth, power, and a lot of energy for activities. He is always busy trying to earn money, buy things, hoard and protect his possessions, and enjoy. She has very strong likes and dislikes, and a strong sense of 'I', 'me', and 'mine' (ego). He is also prone to some negative qualities like anger, arrogance, greed, jealousy, and passion. He may employ unethical means to achieve his goals. Her mood fluctuates and has hard time deciding. He is not focused, worries a lot, and gets agitated. The color for *Rajas* (रजस) is red.

3. *Satv*

A *Sātvic* person has great desire for spiritual knowledge, has love in heart for everyone, kindness, compassion, and faith in God. She has clear goals, knows what is right and wrong, and what her duty is. He works hard to help others without expecting anything in return. There is great control over all speech and actions. There is absence of all negative characteristics like anger, greed, arrogance, jealousy, selfish desires, etc. She is described as 'pure' & 'luminous'. A *Sātvic* person is anxious for peace and happiness for all and desire for true knowledge and wisdom. This desire, however noble, still creates attachment. For salvation (*Moksh*) one has to go beyond this attachment of *Satv* to happiness & knowledge.

Evolve from *Tamas* to *Rajas* to *Satv*

All of us are working under one of the *guṇ*-s which is predominant and others are dormant at any moment. *Védic Dharma* suggests that we evaluate ourselves (not others), find our weaknesses, make necessary changes, and evolve from *tamas* to *rajas* and then to *Satv* in all our activities. This gives us a road map of a path for personal evolution.

1. The first step is to realize the need for change.
2. Then we make a decision to change and find ways about how to change. Initially we try to change everyone other than ourselves. That does not work. Then we decide to change ourselves.
3. Next step is to observe our daily activities, even our thoughts objectively, as if we are somebody else. Find one or two characteristics which are of *Tāmasic* variety, work on them to change to *Rājasic* and then to *Sātvic*.

Activities according to *Guṇ*-s (गुण)

1. Long term goals:

Tāmasic - Long term goals are to sleep, eat, & destroy others.

Rājasic - Long term goals are for personal pleasure, prestige, power, & prosperity.

Sātvic - Long term goals are for unity, love, & welfare of all.

2. Attachment to:

Tāmasic – food and sleep.

Rājasic – is attached to action and desire to acquire worldly objects.

Sātvic – would like happiness & ‘True’ knowledge for all.

3. Actions:

Tāmasic – performs actions without due thought about the results, or how actions are carried out. He denies all responsibility and may get involved in criminal or violent activities to harm others or himself. He has no humility and often procrastinates.

Bhagawad Gītā, XVIII.25, 28

Rājasic – performs activities with arrogance, pomp & show; for selfish reasons to gain personal possessions, prestige, power, and wealth. These activities create anxieties, agitation, bitterness, conflict, & anger. Later these actions may lead to sorrow & depression.

Bhagawad Gītā, XVIII.24, 27

Sātvic – actions are performed without likes & dislikes for the action or the people involved, or insistence on a particular result. Activities are carried out according to *Dharma* and for peace and welfare of all. A *Sātvic* person remains calm in success or failure.

Bhagawad Gitā, XVIII.23, 26

4. Duties:

एवं सदा स्म कर्तव्यं स्वयमेव करिष्यति
प्रभुः सर्वसमर्थो हि ततो निश्चिन्ततां व्रजेत् ॥

Shri Vallabhāchāry

***All of us should perform our own duty
(assigned according to their stage in life, family
circumstances & needs, profession etc.).
We have control only over the present
and not over future results.
God is almighty so leave the outcome
(success or failure) to Him / Her / It.***

A *Tāmasic* person does not carry out his duties because of ignorance or laziness.

A *Rājasic* individual does not perform his duties because of fear of the outcome or if the task is unpleasant or difficult.

A *Sātvic* person carries out all his duties without selfish desire for personal gain and without fear of the outcome and difficulty of the task.

Bhagawad Gitā XVIII.9-10

5. Food

Food and drink play a very important role in maintaining our health and a healthy body is essential for performing all our duties (*Dharma*).

शरीरं आद्यं खलु साधनम् ।

Sharirum āthyam khalu sādhanam

Your own body is the most important instrument.

This is the reason ‘why’ it is so important to keep this instrument in good working order - strong and healthy. Prince Yudhishtir was asked “What is the most important possession of an individual?” And to this question his answer was:

लाभानं श्रेय आरोग्यम् ।

Lābhānam shreya Ārogyam

The greatest blessing is good health (without any disease).

Yudhishtir's answer to Yaksh's question

Mahābhārat

An important advice for maintaining good health is:

युक्ताहारविहारस्य युक्तचेष्टस्य कर्मसु ।
युक्तस्वप्नावबोधस्य योगो भवति दुःखहा ॥ ६:१७ ॥

Yuktāhārvihārasya yuktachestashya Karmasu

Yuktasvapnāvabodhasya yogo bhavati dukhahā.

Appropriate diet, work, and sleep

(all in moderation are essential for good health).

Discipline (Yog) prevents a lot of pain and misery.

Bhagavad Gitā, VI:17

Eating according to Dharma consists of eating healthy food in moderation (discipline) to maintain a healthy body. Healthy lifestyle is the first & most important *Dharma*. Without a healthy body no one can perform his / her duties.

Type of food

Tāmasic – a person eats stale, tasteless, decomposed, or polluted food.

Rājasic – prefers spicy, bitter, sour, salty, or very hot food.

Sātvic – a person eats nutritious food that increases life and strength; and promotes purity of thoughts.

Feelings of the cook

Tāmasic – cook has negative feelings of anger, hate, jealousy, etc.

Rājasic – thinks about ‘What will I get out of this activity?’

Sātvic – cook has love in her heart and wants to share the food with all.

Place

Tāmasic – a person eats in a bar filled with cigarette smoke.

Rājasic – a person who likes to eat in fancy restaurants.

Sātvic – a person prefers to eat simple & healthy food at home or in a temple.

Quantity of food consumed

Tāmasic – consumes a lot of food, whether food is good or not.

Rājasic – eats a lot only if he likes the food.

Sātvic – a person will eat just enough to maintain a healthy body.

Time

Tāmasic – eats at irregular hours or eats lying down.

Rājasic – eats while working or walking.

Sātvic – sits down and eats quietly, slowly, at regular time.

Drink

Tāmasic – individuals consume recreational drugs and drink alcoholic beverages.

Rājasic – drinks excitable, caffeinated beverages.

Sātvic – prefers water, fruit juice, etc.

Bhagawad Gitā, XVII.7-10

6. Sleep:

Tāmasic – person sleeps during the day or while at work.

Rājasic – has difficulty sleeping and has excitable dreams.

Sātvic – enjoys restful, sound sleep at home & at appropriate time. Gets up before sun rise to meditate.

7. Speech

Following are some guidelines for everyday communication:

**सत्यं ब्रूयात् प्रियम् ब्रूयान्नब्रूयात् सत्यमप्रियम् |
प्रियम् च नानृतम् ब्रूयादेशः धर्मः सनातनः ||**

***Speak the truth and what is pleasant to hear.
Do not tell the truth in unpleasant (or angry) words.
Do not tell lies in pleasant words.
This is the teaching of 'Sanātan Dharma'.***

Speech is a very powerful means for carrying out our everyday business:

**संरोहति अग्नीना दग्धं वनं परशुना हतम् |
वाचा दुरूज्गतं; बीभत्सं न संरोहति वाक्क्षतम् ||**

महाभारत

***"A forest which gets destroyed due to a fire or due to an ax,
will grow again in time.***

***But the wound caused by nasty, harsh words
will never heal."***

Bhismacharya's advice to King Yudhishthir

In Mahābhārat

Our lives become complicated when we do not follow this advice.

***"Happiness is when what you think, what you say,
and what you do are in harmony."***

M. K. Gāndhi

Tāmasic – individual talks without thinking, tells lies, complains about everything, criticizes, and uses obscene language.

Rājasic - talks about 'I, me, & mine' all the time.

Sātvic – person thinks & then tells the truth (*Satyam*) in pleasant words (*priyam*), and what is beneficial to all (*hitam*). Her speech is encouraging and up-lifting.

8. Intellect (*Buddhi*):

Tāmasic - has false beliefs and delusions. Thinks that which is morally and ethically 'right' is 'wrong' & what is 'wrong' is 'right'.

Rājasic – is confused about what is 'right' and what is 'wrong'. He cannot decide what to do when there is a moral dilemma.

Sātvic – a person knows 'right' from 'wrong', what is according to *Dharma*, and what is good for all and which brings long-term happiness, prosperity and security for all.

Bhagawad Gitā XVIII.30-32

9. Pleasure is derived from:

Tāmasic – person feels happy after getting up late in the morning, drinking intoxicating drinks, doing harm to others, and destruction of property.

Rājasic – individual feels happy during activities that give pleasure from sense gratification.

Sātvic – person is involved in activities that are good for all. These activities may be difficult in the beginning but bring long lasting pleasure, prosperity & peace to all.

Bhagawad Gitā XVIII.37-39

10. Keeps company of:

Tāmasic – people prefer the company of criminals.

Rājasic – individuals keep company of people who will help him achieve his selfish goals to become rich & famous.

Sātvic – keep company of good people (*satsang*) who live according to *Dharma*.

11. Reading, listening to music, watching movies

Tāmasic – like trashy, vulgar, and violent entertainment.

Rājasic – prefers exciting literature and movies.

Sātvic – reads, listens, and watches value based entertainment.

12. Rituals (*Yagna*):

Tāmasic – performs religious ceremony without faith and knowledge about meaning of mantras or rituals, to gain power over others, harm others, get strength or wealth to destroy others, to torture his own body, and without giving gift (*dakshinā*) to priests (*Brahmin*).

Rājasic – individuals perform rituals to gain personal prestige, profit, or power. Gift (*Dakshinā*) is given to priest (*Brahman*-s) to show off personal wealth.

Sātvic – person performs obligatory rituals with proper understanding of the meaning of mantras, without expecting anything in return, and with a resolve to practice all values mentioned in the ritual. Generous gift (*dakshinā*) is given to the priest with love and respect.

13. Charity (*Dān*):

Tāmasic – individual does not believe in giving any charity or it is given to unworthy cause without love and respect.

Rājasic – person regrets when he has to give charity (*Dān*) or gives to gain something in return.

Sātvic - gives willingly, with faith and humility, to a noble cause with full knowledge about the results of his action, as a sense of duty, and without expectation of getting anything in return.

Bhagawad Gitā XVII.20-22

14. Knowledge:

Tāmasic – person does not have any understanding of the ‘Truth’ (God) or *Dharma*.

Rājasic – individual cannot discriminate ‘right’ from ‘wrong’. He feels that all life forms are separate from each other and different from himself. Other life forms are created for his pleasure.

Sātvic – person feels the same ‘*Paramātmā*’ (life force) pervading the whole universe, all humans, animals, and even the inanimate objects.

Bhagawad Gitā XVIII.20-22

15. Three characters (brothers) from *Rāmāyan*:

Tāmasic – character is *Kumbhakarṇ* who slept for six months, ate for six months and fought against *Rām*.

Rājasic – brother is *Rāvaṇ*. He was very intelligent, knowledgeable, strong, and brave but had weakness for *Sitā* who was married to *Rām* but still abducted her and wanted to marry her.

Sātvic – brother is *Vibhishan*. He left *Rāvaṇ* and joined forces with *Rām* to fight with his brother *Rāvaṇ*.

16. *Tapa* (तप, Disciplined effort):

Tāmasic – individual performs *tapa* with the goal of doing harm to others or for torturing himself.

Rājasic – person performs *tapa* for gaining respect, power, or wealth.

Sātvic – person performs *tapa* to worship *dev*-s with faith and without any selfish motive.

Bhagawad Gitā XVII.14-16

17. Temperament:

Tāmasic – individual is lethargic and vengeful.

Rājasic – is restless and ambitious.

Sātvic – is calm and focused.

18. Worship:

Tāmasic – person worships ghosts.

Rājasic – worships *Yaksh*-s and *Rākshas*-s

Sātvic – worships *Dev*-s (Divine beings).

Bhagawad Gitā XVII.4

Sanskār-s

Life is a sacred journey. Each milestone is celebrated by performing a sacred ceremony. Family and friends get together, lending support, advice and encouragement. *Sanskār-s* are sacraments or holy rites that guide us and remind us about our responsibilities in life, inspire family togetherness and invoke God's blessings. There are 40 *Sanskār-s* for different milestones in life from conception to the last rites.

Important Sanskār-s are:

Simantonayan

Is performed during the sixth and eighth month of pregnancy. Family takes special care of the expectant mother during pregnancy since physical and mental development of the fetus depends on the mother's health. *Simant* ceremony is performed to invoke God's grace for a healthy baby and to remind the family to take good care of the expectant mother. The mother is advised to eat fresh, wholesome, nutritious food, read inspiring books, listen to good music and have good, positive thoughts. She is encouraged to avoid negative feelings of anger, hatred, jealousy, violence, etc. It is believed that what she eats, drinks, thinks, watches, hears, reads, etc.; will affect the baby.

Nāmakaran

When the baby is between 6 to 11 days old, the father whispers the baby's name in the right ear of the infant. Baby's aunt (father's sister) has the honor to cradle the baby and announce the baby's name. Family and friends give gifts to the baby. The aunt receives special gifts from the baby's parents for this ceremony. Personal names have meanings and special significance. The child is named after a mythological hero or a God's name. The selection of a name for a child is very important because the child will emulate the characteristics of the mythological hero or heroine he/she is named after. The hero or heroine becomes an inspiration for the rest of his/her life. Every child should know the meaning of his/her name and the legend behind it. People living outside of India should select names that are easy to pronounce for the local people.

Upanayan

The sacred thread ceremony is also known as *Yagnaopaveet*. The sacred thread has three strands to remind the child of his/her responsibilities towards the Guru, parents, and the community/nation. This ceremony is performed at the age 7 or 8 years when the child is ready to learn the scriptures (*Véd-s*) and the child is introduced to *Brahmcharyāshram*. He is given a sacred thread, and taught *Gāyatri Mantra*.

Vivāh

Wedding ceremony teaches responsibility towards husband, wife, children, community, and the country. The groom holds the hand of the bride and makes a promise that his wife will be the queen of his home and Goddess of his prosperity. He also promises to be firm like a rock in his love and affection for her. It is very important to learn about the vows and *Sapt padi* (seven steps) ceremony before getting married.

***Antyeshti* (अंत्येष्टि)**

Is the last *Sanskār*, a farewell to the departed soul (*ātmā*). *Antyeshti* (final *Yagna* - religious ceremony) is performed after death when the body is offered to the fire (*Agni*). The gross body is reduced back into five elements - earth, water, fire, air, and space - from which it was formed. This ceremony is important for the family and friends of the deceased who have to face the final separation of the departed soul and let the soul continue its journey. Death is considered - not an end of a life - but a transition to a new beginning, another chance to be born in a new body, learn more about how to live a life, improve and evolve.

For all living beings, our greatest fear in life is that of death - our own or that of a close relative or friend. According to our tradition, those who are born have to die and all who die are born again. Since it happens to all of us, our relatives, friends and even enemies; it is not wise to get paralyzed at the thought of death. We all feel the loss but we need to accept the universal truth and move on.

Bhagavad Gitā talks about the soul (Ātman) and how it is different from the physical body:

देहिनः अस्मिन् यथा देहे कौमारं यौवनं जरा ।
तथा देहान्तरप्राप्तिः धीरः तत्र न मुह्यति ॥२:१३॥

***The soul living in this body
(the energy that keeps the physical body alive)
goes through childhood, youth, and old age.
It leaves the body at the time of death.
Knowing this, the wise and the mentally strong (person)
does not grieve (excessively at the time of death).***

***न जायते म्रियते वा कदाचित् न अयम् भूत्वा भविता वा न भूयः ।
अजो नित्यः शाश्वतो अयम् पुराणो न हन्यते हन्यमाने शरीरे ॥२:२०॥***

***The soul (Ātman, energy) is not born and does not die.
It (soul) has no past, future or present
(because it is eternal and indestructible).
It is not born, is permanent, changeless and eternal.
The soul (Ātman) is not killed when the body destroyed.***

वासांसि जीर्णानि यथा विहाय नवानि गृह्णाति नरोऽपराणि ।
तथा शरीराणि विहाय जीर्णानि अन्यानि संयाति नवानि देही ॥२:२२॥

***Just as we give away old clothes and buy new ones,
In the same way the ātman (soul) leaves an old body
and enters a new one.***

**नैनं छिन्दन्ति शस्त्राणि नैनं दहति पावकः ।
न चैनं क्लेदयन्त्यापो न शोषयति मारुतः ॥ २:२३ ॥**

*(Since this energy is invisible and indestructible)
It cannot be cut (killed) by weapons, burnt by fire,
water cannot (penetrate or) wet it,
and the wind cannot dry it.
(Ātman is not affected by these physical forces that
commonly affect our bodies).*

**जातस्य हि ध्रुवो मृत्युः ध्रुवं जन्म मृतस्य च ।
तस्मात् अपरिहार्ये अर्थे न त्वं शोचितुमहसि ॥ २:२७ ॥**

*Death is inevitable for all those who are born
and so is birth for all who die.
Therefore, one should not grieve
for what is certain (to happen).*

Ultimate Goal in Life

We all are at different stages of evolution and one solution does not fit everyone. Everyone has to analyze himself / herself, determine their strengths and weaknesses, remove weaknesses and develop strong, positive tendencies.

What is the ultimate goal in life?

All of us want to be 'Happy' and think that if we had something - money, house, wife / husband, etc., then we will be 'happy'. But with any one or more of the above solutions comes its own problems or issues. If we are seeking long lasting or permanent happiness, it has to come from within ourselves. External factors do not give this long lasting feeling of 'happiness' or 'contentment'. We need to feel very strongly about this and decide to sacrifice everything for this goal. The ignorance (*avidyā*) of this ultimate goal, how to live our lives, become an 'Noble Citizen of the World' (*Āryan*) and how to reach this ultimate goal does not allow us to make right decisions. Realization of this may occur to us after a major disaster in life, from a *Guru*, through discussions with friends or acquaintances (*Satsang*) or reading books.

The goal is to evolve from our present state of 'instant gratification' dependent on pleasures derived from sensory input to a continuous and permanent state of calm mind that can think clearly under all circumstances and work towards bringing peace and prosperity for all through moral and ethical life. This hopefully may lead to release of our soul from the cycle of birth and death (*Moksha*).

How can we reach the ultimate goal?

1. Self-analysis

'Where am I on the path of personal evolution?' Not everyone is capable of objectively looking at themselves and analyzing the situation. Study of '*Védānt*' (scriptures) may help clarify these questions. This study is not easy but worth a try.

2. What are my strong points?

Important values described in Chapter 6 are the positive strengths. Self-analysis can start with asking “How many good values do I have?”

3. What are my weaknesses?

Our common faults are - selfish desires, anger, jealousy, greed, habit of acquiring unnecessary objects and trying to hoard them. Remove all these impurities of mind (Chap. 6), change behavior, live a life according to 'Dharma'.

4. How can I remove my shortcomings?

1. Acknowledgement of our deficiencies is the first step.
2. Daily evaluation of our thoughts, speech and actions by asking “Were they according to the highest moral and ethical standards”.
3. Give up personal likes & dislikes for people, actions and objects.

इन्द्रियस्येन्द्रियस्यार्थे रागद्वेषौ व्यवस्थितौ ।
तयोर्न वशमागच्छेता ह्यस्य परिपन्थिनौ ॥ ३:३४ ॥

***Likes and dislikes (for people, actions and objects)
reside in your sense organs (and the mind)
They are your enemies and do not let them control you.***

Bhagawad Gitā, III.34

4. How to improve next time?

Following practices may also help:

1. Physical level

Performing your duties for your stage and station in life.

Selfless service (*Sewa*) to family, community, country and the world. Actions are performed for the welfare of all, according to *Dharma*, and with an attitude of service. If the goal is to help only your self without any consideration for the family, community, country or the world then it is selfish and against *Dharma* (*Adharma*). Wider the circle of inclusion in all actions; more moral, ethical, or *Dharmaic* the decision will be. Accept results as blessings from God (*prasād*), give credit to and dedicate them to the Lord.

तस्मादसक्तः सततं कार्यं कर्म समाचर ।

असक्तो हि आचरन्कर्म परमाप्नोति पूरुषः ॥ ३:१९ ॥

Always perform actions required by your Dharma.

***Actions performed without (selfish) emotional attachment
(to people, methods or results)***

Will lead a person to his ultimate goal.

Bhagawad Gitā III.19

कर्मणैव हि संसिद्धिमास्थिता जनकादयः ।

लोकसंग्रहमेवापि संपश्यन्कर्तुमर्हसि ॥ ३:२० ॥

King Janak (Sita's father) reached this goal by his actions.

***It is important to (do your duty of a King)
for the welfare of your subjects.***

Bhagawad Gitā III.20

**यत्करोषि यदश्रासि यज्जुहोषि ददासि यत् ।
यत्तपस्यसि कौन्तेय तत्कुरुष्व मदर्पणम् ॥९:२७॥**

***O son of Kunti, offer everything to Me (God)
that you do or eat, rituals that you perform,
charity you give and sacrifices you make
(do not take credit or feel proud).***

Bhagawad Gitā, IX.27

2. Emotional level

By developing love and faith in the Supreme (*Bhakti Yog*).

3. Intellectual level

By study of scriptures and accepting the concept that *Ātmā* (soul) is part of *Paramātmā* (God). It is the same in all living beings and it is indestructible.

Ayam ātmā Brahm

My soul is the same as the Universal Consciousness.

Contemplation and meditation on these concepts helps.

Analyze all thoughts, words, and deeds – why, how, what next, etc.

5. What can help me to reach my goal?

1. Study (*Svādhyāy*) scriptures - books, videos, etc. on your own.
2. *Guru* - quite often a teacher is necessary to help us interpret scriptures and guide us. A *Guru* should be selected with great care.
3. *Satsang* - company of 'good' people is very important because it affects our behavior and we can learn from each other.
4. Practicing 'good' values - telling the truth, practicing compassion, etc.

6. The ultimate positive attitude to develop is:

**एवं यः सर्वभूतेषु पश्यत्यात्मानमात्मना ।
सः सर्वसमतामेत्य ब्रह्माभ्येति परं पदम् ॥**

***He who thus recognizes that his/her individual soul
(Self, Atman), is the same as the universal soul (God)
that exists in all beings,
treats everyone as he/she would like to be treated,
enters the highest state, Brahman.***

Manusmruti 12.125

All these will purify the mind, the pure mind becomes quiet, and then it will be ready for meditation.

Different Methods Prescribed for Personal Evolution

If we look at our traditions we can find many ways by which we can transform our lives and evolve. Our choice depends on our aptitude, knowledge, background, circumstances, etc. We can select one or more of the following:

1. *Āshram-s* (stages of life) – Performing duties prescribed for each stage of life. *They* teach us:
 - i. *Dama* (disciplined effort) in *Brahmcharyāshram* – first 25 years of life.
 - ii. *Yagna* (selfless service) in *Gruhasthāshram* – age 25 to 50.
 - iii. *Abhyās* more detailed study of scriptures in *Vānaprasthāshram* – age 50 to 75 years.
 - iv. *Tyāg* or renunciation of all attachments to worldly things & people in *Sanyāsāshram*.

2. Four Paths - following one or combination of two or more paths

i. *Bhakti Yog* – Path of Devotion

ii. *Karma Yog* – Path of Action

iii. *Gnān Yog* – Path of Knowledge

iv. *Rāj Yog* – Path of Meditation

3. *Guṇ-s* (गुण) (basic characteristics of each individual) – one can try to evolve from *tamas* to *rajas* to *sattv* (more about *Guṇ-s* (गुण) in Chapter 13).

4. *Sanskār-s* – there are some forty milestones throughout our life that we can celebrate. They remind us of our duties as we progress from conception to death (Chapter 14).

5. *Dev* (deities) – each of our deities has some characteristics that we can emulate. Depending on our weakness we can select an appropriate deity. For example if we need strength we can worship *Hanumanji* or *Durgamātā* and work towards the goal of getting strong and brave.

It is very hard for most of us to imagine or worship a God who is without a physical existence, a shape or form. We need something concrete to relate to. Icons or *Murti-s* are created so that we can relate to the indescribable God. We can relate to the unknown through what we know or can experience - a form or shape or a picture. A *Murti* is like a mathematical symbol ∞ that we use for infinity. The symbol represents something very hard to explain in one word. There is nothing wrong about worshipping a *Murti* or to be ashamed of. This is only an intermediate step to understand and focus on the indescribable and ultimately to realize or experience the Divine. Later, Icons were created to show superhuman powers attributed to different Gods. Rituals are performed to invoke specific powers and/or obtain special results.

Rituals are often performed without understanding the meaning of the *Shlok-s* recited or the reasons for different steps of the *pujā* (worship ritual). Some rituals are performed to celebrate an occasion like a wedding or birth or death. Others perform them to fulfill selfish desires e.g. to obtain more wealth or get over an illness. The most important reason for performing a ritual is to develop an intense devotion and focus on the ultimate reality - God.

Rituals are performed as a worship of a deity. It is an Icon in the form of a *Murti*, a sacred fire, or a drawing. All these represent the formless, invisible, indescribable God - the universal energy and the creator of us all. The rituals help us focus and communicate with the Supreme.

It is always better to know the meaning of all *Sanskrit Shlok*-s and the steps of the *pujā* (worship) ritual. It is quite reasonable to ask the priest reasons for using a coconut, or water, or leaves, etc. in a *pujā* and what they represent?' If rituals are performed without proper understanding and only for selfish reasons they do not help in achieving the ultimate goal of 'Self-realization' or mental peace.

6. **Festivals** – there is a meaning behind or reason for celebrating a festival. Learning about this can show us a path to further evolution.
7. **Vrat** – is a resolution. Some resolve to 'not eat salt', or 'fast' or 'not speak' on certain days. This practice improves our willpower and discipline.
8. **Abhyās** – study of *Bhagavad Gitā*, *Rāmāyan*, etc. and learning from these good books.
9. **Satsang** – keeping good company and learning from each other.
10. **Japa** – repetition of a mantra or holy name.
11. **Yātrā** – visiting holy places. Holy places have an effect on some individuals inspiring them to become more spiritual.
12. **Rituals** – Most of us have observed or participated in religious ceremonies or rituals performed by priests in temples or at home. In the *Védic* period, fire was worshiped as a symbol of God. Fire gives heat and light. Light represents knowledge and knowledge destroys the darkness of ignorance about God. Heat and knowledge symbolically destroy all our sins (like selfishness, anger, arrogance, etc.) and purify us.
13. **Dhyān** - Meditation

Deciding on Which Path to take

It is important to know 'how our minds work' and 'how to make wise decisions for important issues in life'.

The Hierarchy

How do we process information and make decisions?

इन्द्रियेभ्यः परं मनो मनसः सत्त्वमुत्तमम् ।
सत्तवादधि महानात्मा महतोऽव्यक्तमुत्तमम् ॥

Kathā Upanishad II-vi-7

(In this hierarchy) the Mind is superior to the senses.

Over the Mind is (discriminatory) intelligence.

(Every individual's) Ātmā

(conscience) is over the intelligence.

The Supreme over all is the invisible,

all knowing Bhrahman (God).

Our sense organs (eyes, ears, nose, etc.) receive information from the external world and are processed by the 'Mind'. Then information goes to intelligence for making decisions about further action depending on our past experiences and present circumstances. Next layer is our *Ātmā* (Soul) which decides whether our decision to act is morally and ethically sound or not. Sometimes we need to consult the Supreme Court Judge - *Brahman* (God), final authority, to help us decide.

Mind

‘Mind’ is described as ‘flow of thoughts’. Mind is like a monkey - it jumps from one branch (thought) of a tree to another all day long. With a mind like that no one can achieve anything worthwhile. The mind has to be focussed on one topic - what we want to do or what we are doing - otherwise we cut our fingers while chopping vegetables. The most important first step in creating a bright future is to discipline or control our mind.

The interaction between body, mind, intellect, and conscience are compared with prince *Arjun* sitting in a chariot with five horses (five senses) driven by *Shri Krushñ* (discriminatory intellect). The horses are our five senses. If we do not have any control over our senses, we can be driven off a cliff of over indulgence. Our mind is the reins that control the senses (horses). The reins are in the hands of *Shri Krushñ* or our *Vivék Buddhi* (discriminatory intelligence) or conscience.

Vivék Buddhi

Is the ability to discriminate between good and bad, merit and demerit, moral and immoral, ethical and unethical paths in life. It also helps us distinguish between the Self (*Ātmā*, indestructible, or permanent) and the non-Self (perishable physical body). No book or teacher can tell us ‘what to do’ under all circumstances and hence we need to develop our own ‘*Vivék Buddhi*’. Sometimes teachers and books may give us conflicting advice. It is that time when our own *Vivék Buddhi* helps us decide the right path.

Vivék Buddhi (discriminatory intelligence that helps decide between good and bad, path to take or avoid) guides and controls the senses through our mind. We all can develop this *Vivék Buddhi*. It takes into consideration past experiences and a long-term view of possible outcomes of any action. What looks like an easy, pleasant (*préyas*) or fun thing to do in the beginning may not be in the best interest of us or others (*shréyas*).

Shréyas & Préyas

अन्यच्छ्रेयोऽन्यदुतैव प्रेयस्ते
उभे नानार्थे पुरुषं सिनीतः ।
तयोः श्रेय आददानस्य साधु भवति
हीयतेऽर्थाद्युत प्रेयो वृणीते ॥

***(In life quite often we have a choice)
One (path) that is 'Good' (in long term)
and the other is 'Pleasant'.
The end results of these two (paths) are different.
One who chooses the 'Good' (path) becomes a 'Noble' person.
But one who chooses the 'Pleasant' (easy path)
May end up in misery or a disaster.***

Kathā Upanishad II-i-1

We all want to be 'happy' in life but how we achieve that goal is also important. There are two paths that we can take for achieving a goal. 'Shréyas' & 'Préyas' are two Sanskrit words that describe something that is 'good' for us in the long run and something that is initially pleasant and enjoyable to do but in the long run it is harmful to us and/or to the society.. Frequently we have to make a choice between these two. Hopefully we will select the path that is 'Shreyas'.

श्रेयश्च प्रेयश्च मनुष्यमेतः
तौ सम्परीत्य विविनक्ति धीरः ।
श्रेयो हि धीरोऽभि प्रेयसो वृणीते
प्रेयो मन्दो योगक्षेमाद् वृणीते ॥ २-१-२ ॥

***In life we are faced with which path to select -
'Good or Pleasant'.***

***The wise, mature, & steady person
considers all aspects of the situation,
uses discriminative intelligence***

***And selects the 'Good' over the 'Pleasant' path,
Whereas the greedy, ignorant and short sighted
selects the 'Pleasant' path
Out of his weakness to satisfy his senses.***

Kathā Upanishad II-i-1

The story of Pinnochio - a wooden puppet - illustrates the struggle between going to school or to 'Pleasure Island'. Pinnochio transforms into a donkey when he decides to go to Pleasure Island where children smoke cigarettes, drink beer, go to movies and do not have to go to school. He takes the easy, pleasant, enjoyable path (*Préyas*) and gradually turns into a donkey. Later he escapes from the island, risks his own life to save his father & becomes a real 'man' - evolving from a wooden puppet to a living human being. This was the '*Shréyas*' path - a noble road of great difficulty and becoming a real boy with a heart. It takes a lot of will power and self-discipline to take this path.

Another example is when we are studying, and feel tired or bored of solving a really difficult math problem. We have a choice - we can give up and watch a movie instead or read, research more and learn how to solve the problem. First one is easy and pleasant to begin with but in the long run will do harm (*Préyas*). While the second one is hard and unpleasant in the beginning but 'good' for us in the long run (*Shréyas*).

Our friends may suggest smoking 'pot' or drinking beer or watching a naughty movie. Always think of '*Shréyas*' & '*Préyas*' and make a sensible choice - one that is good for you in the long run. What looks like a 'fun' (*Préyas*) activity and easy path may not be in your best interest

(*Préyas*) in the long run. *Védic Dharm* teaches us ‘how to think, make good decisions in life and become ‘Noble Citizen’ of the world’.

**भोग ऐश्वर्य प्रसक्तानाम् तया अपहृत चेतसाम् ।
व्यवसायात्मिका बुद्धिः समाधौ न विधीयते ॥**

*Bhog aishvarya prasaktānām tayā apahruta chetasām
Vyavasāyātmica Buddhihi. samādhau na vidhiyate.*

*People who are engrossed in activities for fun, fame and fortune
Loose their discriminatory intelligence (about good & bad) and
Forget their important goals (purpose in life)
Cannot succeed in meditation & achieving Moksh
(liberation from the cycle of birth & death).*

Bhagavad Gitā II, 44

Some of the factors that interfere with developing *Vivék Buddhi* are:

1. Very strong likes and dislikes for people, objects, entertainment and work.
2. Negative feelings like fear, anger, hate, jealousy, greed, selfish desires, and arrogance.
3. Inability to see the ‘big’ picture or the final goal.

Desires and Destiny

The word 'DESIRE' is used 45 times in this book and suggests the importance of learning a little more about our desires. All actions are performed because of a desire within us. Desire can be '*Tamasic*' (destructive), '*Rājasic*' (selfish), or '*Sātvic*' (noble). First two can be harmful to the individual and the society and the last one is beneficial to both. In the present times of *Kaliyug* there are more people in the first two categories. All actions when performed out of *Sātvic* desire which benefits all - humans, animals, plants & mother earth - is the best because they lead to purity of mind (removal of negative feelings) and benefits all. These actions are also performed without expectation of personal gain and worry about a definite outcome so that it does not create anxiety.

Dharma Shāstra (scriptures) tell us:

1. Which desires are 'good'?
2. Which desires should be avoided?
3. How to fulfill 'Good' desires?

Practicing (*Sāadhanā*) lessons from '*Dharma Shāstra*' will lead to 'Purity of mind of the person who practices it, prosperity in the world, peace within yourself, in your community and in the Universe'. It teaches everyone to live with love and respect for all and understanding about everyone's needs. Everyone feels fulfilled, satisfied and complete. No one (individual, community or country) wants to take anything away from others. *Dharma* is for '*Abhyudaya*' (progress & prosperity of all) and '*Nihshreyas*' (निःश्रेयस = supreme happiness or bliss) - and personal evolution.

Can we create our own destiny?

**काममया एवायं पुरुष इति
स यथाकामो भवति तत्क्रतुर भवति
यत्क्रतुर भवति तत्कर्म कुरुते तदभिसंपद्यते**

***Kaamamaya evayam purusha iti
Sa Yatha kaamo bhavati tat kratur bhavati
Yat kratur bhavati tat Karma kurute
Yat Karma kurute tad abhisam padyate***

***Our strong desires make us what we are.
Our desire determines our decision to work (make an effort).
We perform actions according to that decision.
Hard work produces good results
and thus creates our destiny.***

Bruhadāranyak Upanishad IV, 4.5

Our actions originate from our thoughts and decisions, and create our future.

***“Always aim at complete harmony
of thought and word and deed.
Always aim at purifying your thoughts
and everything will be well.
There is nothing more potent than a thought.
Deed follows word and word follows thought.
The world is a result of a mighty thought and
where the thought is mighty and pure
the result is always mighty and pure.”***

M. K. Gāndhi in “Harijan”, 24 April 1937

Power of Thoughts

***Whatever you think, that you will be.
If you think yourselves weak, weak you will be;
if you think yourselves strong, strong you will be;
if you think yourselves impure, impure you will be;
if you think yourselves pure, pure you will be.***

Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902)

How do you train your mind to make good decisions?

A quiet mind without distractions can focus on one issue or problem much better than a mind that is running after multiple thoughts, agitated, angry, or disturbed.

1. Sit quietly & focus on your breathing as often as you can.
2. Get rid of your strong 'likes' & dislikes'.
3. Do what's important and essential even if you don't like it.
4. Decide on your 'goals'
5. Plan out each step you need to take to achieve your goal.
6. Implement
7. Work hard
8. Persevere and
9. Avoid multitasking.

Everyday Practices

Early Morning

Dyān (Meditation)

Ideal time to wake up for meditation is called *Brahm Muhūrt* (ब्रह्म मुहूर्त). It is 1 hour and 36 minutes before sunrise and lasts for 48 minutes, usually between 3:30 a.m. and 5:30 a.m. Our mind and surroundings are very calm & quiet and it is the most suitable time for meditation.

Practice silence and you will acquire silent knowledge.

***In this silent knowledge is a computing system
that is far more precise, far more accurate
and far more powerful than anything
that is contained in the boundaries of rational thought.”***

Dr. Deepak Chopra

Yog Āsan

Practicing Yog Āsans helps to keep our physical body in good shape.

Prayers

Before starting any educational activity:

Goddess Saraswati is the Head of the Department of Education.

***सरस्वती नमस्तुभ्यं वरदे कामरूपिणि ।
विद्यारम्भं करिष्यामि सिद्धिर्भवतु मे सदा ॥***

***O Goddess Saraswati, I bow to you and pray.
You fulfill everyone’s aspirations”.
I am starting my studies, (please bless me) with success
(in my studies) all the time.”***

Prayer Before a Group Activity

ॐसंगच्छध्वं संवदध्वं
सं वो मनांसि जानताम्
देवा भागं यथा पूर्वे
सञ्जानाना उपासते ॥

ॐ saṁgacchadhwaṁ saṁvadadhwaṁ
saṁ vo manāṁsi jānatām
devā bhāgaṁ yathā pūrve
sañjānānā upāsate ॥

*Let our minds be in agreement (let us have the same goals).
Let us all speak with one voice.
Let us all work together in harmony
(to achieve our common goal);
Just as the Divine people shared the elixir of life
amongst all in the community.*

Before Meals

All actions are performed as an offering to God (*Brahman*, Truth). Eating a meal is also considered a ritual offering, an essential act to maintain the body so that it can function well to serve the noble causes as a service to the Lord of the Universe. It is not for personal pleasure.

**ब्रह्मार्पणं ब्रह्म हविः ब्रह्माग्नौ ब्रह्मणा हुतम् ।
ब्रह्मैव तेन गन्तव्यं ब्रह्म-कर्म-समाधिना ॥**

Bhagavad Gitā, IV:24

***I offer Ghee (clarified butter) that is (part of) Brahman
to the Brahman that is the sacrificial fire (hunger).
She / he who carries out all actions
as an offering to Brahman,
Will ultimately become part of the Brahman
(the Universal Truth).***

In the Evening before switching ‘on’ lights

**शुभं करोति कल्याणं आरोग्यं धनसंपदः ।
शत्रु-बुद्धि-विनाशाय दीप ज्योतिर्नमोऽस्तु ते ॥**

***I bow (Namaskār) to the light that brings me wellbeing
in the form of good health, wealth, and material prosperity.
It destroys the enemy (my negative) intellect
(ignorance and poor judgment).***

Before going to bed

**करचरणकृतं वाक् कायजं कर्मजं वा
श्रवणनयनजं वा मानसं वाऽपराधम् ।
विहितमविहित वा सर्वमेतत् क्षमस्व
जय जय करुणाब्धे श्री महादेव शम्भो ॥**

***O Triumphant, Merciful, always forgiving Lord Shiv;
Please forgive me for all wrong or harmful actions I might
have performed through my speech, hearing, eyes, or mind
(thoughts), or by my hands, feet, body and actions
consciously or unconsciously.***

Shānti Mantra

Invocation for peace and harmony that can be recited before a class, a meeting or starting a project:

**ॐ सहनाववतु । सह नौ भुनक्तु ।
सह वीर्यं करवावहै ।
तेजस्विनावधीतमस्तु मा विद्विषावहै ॥
ॐ शान्तिः । शान्तिः । शान्तिः ।**

Found in many *Upanishad*-s

***Aum, May He protect us
(teacher and student or a group of coworkers).
May we enjoy the results of our work together.
May we all cooperate with each other.
May our effort (study or work) be brilliant.
May we not have bitter arguments between us.
Aum let there be Peace (within us).
Let there be Peace (in our immediate surroundings).
Let there be Peace (in the universe).***

For the wellbeing of all

**ॐ सर्वेषां स्वस्तिर्भवतु ।
सर्वेषां शान्तिर्भवतु ॥
सर्वेषां पूर्णं भवतु ।
सर्वेषां मङ्गलं भवतु ॥**

***Aum (O Lord) may all experience good fortune.
May there be peace everywhere.
May all be content.
May all receive Divine favor.***

ॐ सर्वे भवन्तु सुखिनः ।
सर्वे सन्तु निरामयाः ॥
सर्वे भद्राणि पश्यन्तु ।
मा कश्चित् दुःखभाग् भवेत् ॥

*Aum May all be happy.
May all be healthy.
May all see Divinity everywhere.
May no one suffer any misfortune.*

Prayer for Progress on Spiritual Path

ॐ असतो मा सद् गमय ।
तमसो मा ज्योतिर्गमय ।
मृत्योर्मा अमृतं गमय ।
ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः

*Aum (O Lord) lead me from untruth (darkness, ignorance)
to the 'Truth' (Ultimate Reality, God).
From darkness (ignorance) to Light (Knowledge).
From death to Immortality.
Aum Peace(within me),
Peace (within my immediate surroundings),
Peace (all throughout the Universe).*

Bruhadāranyak Upanishad, 1-3-28

For Enlightenment

Gāytri Mantra is a very common prayer for enlightenment of all:

**ॐ भूर्भुवः स्वः तत्सवितुर्वरेणं ।
भर्गो देवस्य धीमहि धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात् ॥**

ऋग्वेद (Roog Véd) III 62, 10

***Aum (symbol of God, Brahman) we pray to Sun
(representing Nārāyan - God)
that created earth (physical plane), atmosphere, & heaven
(svarg lok) and
Who is the source of light (representing knowledge).
Please enlighten the intellect of all
(remove ignorance
and teach us how to live according to Dharma).***

Yathā Icchasi Tathā Kuru

Finally the Choice is Yours

**उद्धरेदात्मनाऽऽत्मानं नात्मानमवसादयेत् ।
आत्मैव ह्यात्मनो बन्धुरात्मैव रिपुरात्मनः ॥६:५॥**

***Your Ātmā (soul, conscience) can lift yourself up
(but) do not let it degrade you.
Your Ātmā (conscience) only is your (true) friend
but it can also be your (worst) enemy.***

Bhagawad Gitā, VI.5

In the last chapter of *Bhagawad Gitā* Shri Krushṇ tells Arjun:

विमृश्यैतदशेषेण यथेच्छसि तथा कुरु ॥१८:६३॥

***Think (about) all that (I have said)
and then do as you please
(the final choice is yours).***

Bhagawad Gitā, XVIII.63

Advice from Gautam Buddha:

***“Do not accept what I have said
because it has been so said in the past;
Do not accept it
because it has been handed down by tradition;
Do not accept it thinking it may be so;
Do not accept it because it is in the Holy Scriptures;
Do not accept it because it can be proven by inference;
Do not accept it thinking it is worldly wisdom;
Do not accept it because it seems plausible;
Do not accept it because it is said by a famous or holy monk;
But if you find that it appeals to your sense of discrimination
and conscience as being conducive to the benefit and
happiness of all;
then accept it and live up to it.”***

Best wishes for a very fruitful and enlightening journey.

***ॐ शान्तिः । शान्तिः । शान्तिः ।
ॐ Shantih Shantih Shantihi.***

Appendix I

Some Interesting Quotes about India

***“In India I found a race of mortals living upon the Earth
but not adhering to it,
inhabiting cities but not being fixed in them,
possessing everything but possessed by nothing.”***

Apollonius Tyanaeus (1st Century CE)

Greek thinker and traveler

***“Whenever I have read any part of the Véd-s,
I have felt that some unearthly
and unknown light illuminated me.
In the greatest teachings of the Véd-s,
there is no touch of sectarianism.
It is of all ages, climes and nationalities
and the royal road for
the attainment of the Great Knowledge.”***

Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862)

American naturalist, philosopher and writer

***"India was the motherland of our race,
and Sanskrit the mother of Europe's languages:
she was the mother of our philosophy;
mother, through the Arabs, of much of our mathematics;
mother, through the Buddha,
of the ideals embodied in Christianity;
mother, through the village community,
of self-government and democracy.***

Mother India is in many ways the mother of us all"

Will & Ariel Durant (1885 – 1981), American Historians

Authors of 'Story of Civilization'

***"The ancient civilization of India differs from
those of Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Greece,
in that its traditions have been preserved without
breakdown to present day."***

Arthur Basham (1914 – 1986)

Australian Historian

***"India is the cradle of the human race,
the birthplace of human speech,
the mother of history,
the grandmother of legend,
and the great grandmother of tradition.
Our most valuable and most instructive materials
in the history of man are treasured up in India only."***

Mark Twain (1835 – 1910)

American author

***"The Bhagavad-Gitā is
the most systematic statement of spiritual evolution
of endowing value to mankind.
It is one of the most clear and comprehensive summaries of
perennial philosophy ever revealed;
hence its enduring value is subject not only to India
but to all of humanity."***

Aldous Huxley (1894 – 1963)

***"India conquered and dominated
China culturally for 20 centuries
without ever having to send a single soldier
across her border."***

Hu Shih

Former Ambassador of China to USA

Appendix II

Great Reformers of India

A Timeline

Véd-s are timeless scriptures that were revealed to *Rooshi-s* (sages) and passed on from one generation to the next by repetition and memorization. Great *Rooshi-s* did not leave their names, claimed copyright or charged money to teach. Research scholars have developed new chronologies based on the position of stars as described in *Véd-s* and *Purañ-s*. For example, a *Roog Védic* verse describes the winter solstice at Aries that correlates to around 6500 BCE (8,500 years ago). Learned scholars, from East and West, now believe the *Roog Védic* people who called themselves *Āryan* were indigenous to India, and there never was an *Āryan* invasion.

There is evidence of travel, trade, and exchange of knowledge between China, Persia, Middle Eastern, South East Asian, Eastern Mediterranean countries and India since prehistoric times.

5000 BCE – Well planned cities developed along *Sindhu* (Indus) and *Saraswati* rivers.

3100 BCE - *Mahābhārat* war – *Dharma* is taught by *Shri Krushñ* to *Arjun* and recorded by *Véd Vyās* as *Bhagavad Gitā*. People were performing rituals to obtain wealth and power for themselves. Some *pandits* were wasting time on philosophical and religious discussions. *Bhagavad Gitā* emphasizes ‘selfless service’ for the benefit of the society and ‘performance of one’s own duty without expecting anything in return’. It becomes a handbook on how to live one’s life.

2600 – 2000 BCE - *Sindhu-Saraswati* river civilization reaches its peak.

2000 BCE - *Saraswati* river dries up and people migrate.

600 BCE - A unified *Bhāratiya* culture has developed. *Sushruta* develops complex surgical techniques like reconstruction of the nose.

599 to 527 BCE - *Mahāvīr Swami* is born in a Hindu family. He emphasized *Ahimsā*, *Moksh*, and *Bhrahmachary* to address weaknesses in the society such as violence and sensuous pleasure oriented activities.

563 to 483 BCE - *Gautam Buddha* was born in a Hindu family. He also addressed weaknesses in the society like violence, reliance on rituals to gain wealth & power, endless intellectual discussions on religious practices, etc. and suggested an 'eight fold path' consisting of right thought, right speech, right action etc.

321 BCE - *Maurya* dynasty rules over the whole of India. Great advances in the fields of art, science, economy, music, dance, architecture, astronomy, etc. are achieved.

200 BCE - *Tiruvalluvar* writes '*Tirukural*' – a treatise on ethics.

320 CE - *Gupta* dynasty rules over all of India.

800 CE – *Shri Ādi Shankarāchārya* revives Hinduism.

1469 CE - *Guru Nānak* was born in a Hindu family. Hindus were divided by caste etc. and were being persecuted by Muslims. He taught equality of all.

1825 to 1883 – *Swami Dayānand Saraswati* emphasized life according to original teachings from *Vēd*-s, devotion to one God, universal love, justice, equality of men and women, disciplined living, and service of mankind.

1863 to 1902 - Swami Vivekānand introduced *Védānt* and *Yog* to Europe and USA to and spoke at The Parliament of World's Religions in Chicago (1893). He later started the Rāmakrishna Mission.

1869 to 1948 – Mahātma Gāndhi - for the first time in the history of the world, mighty British and other European empires were destroyed by a civil disobedience movement, started by Mahātmā Gāndhi, based on truth and nonviolence. He lived according to the teachings of *Bhagavad Gitā*.

Appendix III

Vishesh Dharma

Duties of a King, President, Prime Minister or Dictator

1. First and foremost duty of a 'Head of State' is to live a life according to Dharma. He / She has to set a good example for all her / his subjects. The first conquest of the king is to conquer his own five senses and have total control over them. He / she cannot afford to get attached to 'pleasures of the senses'. This is very important so that his personal and state enemies do not take advantage of her weaknesses. Some of these weaknesses are anger, arrogance, crude language, liquor, gambling, inappropriate attraction towards the opposite sex and harsh punishment of people who do not agree or have committed minor crimes. Lust for power and sex can lead to disaster for the King and the country. The Head of State has to be strong physically, mentally and spiritually to stay calm and focussed equally during tragedies and success. A President should have all his faculties and emotions under perfect control all the time - even during a disaster and after winning a war. Extremes like depression and euphoria need to be avoided at all times.
2. Most important duty of a 'Head of State' is welfare of the country and all his/her subjects. All subjects' basic needs of water, food, shelter, safety, etc. need to be fulfilled. Some of the other important duties are to support teachers, health care workers, army, and all in the judicial system who maintain law and order.
3. Qualities of a 'Head of State':
 - a. She needs to be very intelligent and in excellent physical & mental health. He should also be knowledgeable so that he / she can discriminate between wise and foolish advisers and ministers, good and bad advice, able to select good friends and know enemies of the state. Other positive traits are - truthfulness so that people believe him. A King will need lots of patience to listen to issues that concern his subjects, kind and compassionate.
 - b. Knowledge of '*Rājñiti*' (Governance, how to rule a kingdom), art of warfare and use of arms is also important.
 - c. Art of 'how to negotiate with other friendly and enemy heads of states'.

d. Excellent judge of character and ability to select best candidates for important positions like - Prime Minister & other ministers, judges, generals, spies etc.

e. A King has to be charitable towards his subjects, elderly, sick, disabled, women and children.

f. She should have the ability to pay attention to details in planning a project for his empire.

4 In a Democratic country, the Prime Minister is always in the 'lime light', he has to learn to behave - speak and act - like a noble man. Avoid all negative characteristics of a human being mentioned before. He has to set a good example by his behavior, speech and actions all the time. He has to be humble but smart enough to be willing to learn from his mistakes and advice from wise people.

5. Only the King should know about his thoughts, decisions and actions. With people a king has to behave as if he trusts them completely but gather information on everyone through spies. The identities of his spies who work for him, their findings, etc.; should be kept secret from everyone, even his Prime Minister. They keep an eye on friends and enemies of the state and bring information directly to the King. The spies should be able to pretend and behave like imbeciles, blind or deaf and able to suffer cold, heat, hunger, etc. They have to be very intelligent, wise & loyal to the king.

5. Citizens elect the King, President or Prime Minister. It is citizens' duty to elect intelligent, knowledgeable, honest, trustworthy, kind, compassionate, person with a proven record of excellent administrative skills. Other above mentioned qualities should also be considered.

6. A Head of State and Judges she appoints should be impartial and punish criminals with compassion. Punishments should be according to the crime committed. All Judges need to be trustworthy, knowledgeable, compassionate and fair.

7. Taxes are levied according to the ability of people to pay without hurting the basic necessities of the public. Taxes are imposed judiciously - taking into consideration people's ability to pay and amount of money necessary for running a benevolent government. Just like:

***“A bee collects honey from the flowers
without causing any damage to the flower.”***

8. A King should study his friends & enemies for their strengths & weaknesses. For a head of state or a country, 'there are no permanent friends or enemies' - everything depends on circumstances.
9. The King has to have the ability to decide 'how to win over' people:
 - a. A friend can be appreciated by a gift.
 - b. With a stronger adversary by conciliation, making treaties, creating divisions within the enemy camp.
 - c. With a weaker state by war as a last resort.
10. A loyal follower of the King, a guest and enemy who has surrendered in war - they all need protection of the President or Prime Minister.
11. Very rarely under extenuating circumstances a King may have to adapt immoral means to protect his country and his subjects.

Selection of Advisors & Ministers

1. All Advisors & Ministers who are experts in their fields and completely loyal to the country and the king are selected. They are expected to give truthful & honest advice to the king.
2. Army Generals are selected for their bravery, physical and mental strength, proficiency in war strategy, & use of weapons.
3. Priests knowledgeable in scriptures, morals and ethics give advice and guidance during moral dilemmas.
4. Avoid selecting advisors who flatter the King, who procrastinate, are malicious, mean, or lazy.
5. Unqualified, wicked, corrupt or unfaithful advisor can destroy a kingdom.

Peace of Mind

Under following conditions a king loses his/her 'peace of mind':

1. Greed for power, prestige, leaving a legacy of greatness, acquiring treasures or territory by immoral means, etc.
2. A King who has gained something illegally.

3. Insecure Queen or Dictator who is afraid of losing her wealth or power.
4. Someone who has immoral or illegal desires.

Appendix IV

Further Reading

1. “The Essentials of Hinduism” by Swami Bhaskarananda. Pub. Viveka Press, Seattle, 1994.
2. “Isāvāsyā Upanishad” by Swami Chinmayananda. Pub. Central Chinmaya Mission Trust.
3. “Mundakopanishad” translation and commentary by Swami Chinmayananda. Pub. Central Chinmaya Mission Trust.
4. “Sreemad Bhagavad Geeta” by Swami Chinmayananda. Pub. Central Chinmaya Mission Trust.
5. Discourses on Taittiriya Upanishad by Swami Chinmayananda. Pub. Central Chinmaya Mission Trust.
6. “The Art of Living” by Swami Chinmayānanda. Pub. Central Chinmaya Mission Trust.
7. “The Bhagavad Gitā” by Eknath Easwaran. Pub. Nilgiri Press.
8. “The Dhammapada” by Eknath Easwaran. Pub. Nilgiri Press.
9. “The Upanishads” by Eknath Easwaran. Pub. Nilgiri Press.
10. “The Essence of Hinduism” by M. K. Gāndhi. Compiled and edited by V. B. Kher. Pub. Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1987.
11. “The Message of the Gitā” by M. K. Gāndhi. Pub. Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad.
12. “A History of India and Hindu Dharma”, Hinduism Today, December 1994.
13. “The Complete Idiot’s Guide to Hinduism” by Linda Johnsen. Pub. Alpha.
14. “Foundations of Indian Culture” by K. M. Munshi. Pub. Bhāratiya Vidyā Bhavan, Mumbai, 1988.
15. “Mohan-Mālā” compiled by R. K. Prabhu. Pub. Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1949.
16. “Sri Isopanishad” by BhaktiVédānta Swami Prabhupāda.
17. “Mahabharata” by Kamala Subramaniam. Pub. Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay.

Appendix V

Useful websites

1. Hindupedia, the Hindu Encyclopedia < http://www.hindupedia.com/en/Main_Page>
2. Hinduism Today < <http://www.hinduismtoday.com/>>
3. Hindu Wisdom < <http://hinduwisdom.info/index.htm>>
4. India in Classrooms < <http://www.indiainclassrooms.org/index.htm>>
5. Védic Literature in Sanskrit <http://is1.mum.edu/vedicreserve/>

Appendix VI

Videos

1. Hinduism in British Classroom <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OAG5aHGhHLo>>
2. Hinduism for US Police <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V7ROQ-EcJvU>>
3. History of Hindu India : From Ancient Times
<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dBZRTzXARWM>>
4. History of Hindu India: 300-1,000 CE
<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jokLX2aPgo8>>
5. The History of Hindu India, 1000-1850 CE
<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lr8QxoSyrYI>>
6. The History of Hindu India, 1850 to 1947
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nx_vSuduwAk>
7. “Dharma Shastra” by Swami Tejomayananda, Chinmaya Mission.