

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* or *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 eco-system and will bring peace within individuals, communities & countries; and lead to progress and prosperity of all.*

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 86 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 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 wide spread hunger, epidemic killing millions, weapons of mass destruction ready to be fired, wild fires, 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 multi-national corporations and political leaders have ruined the environment by burning forests and ruining farm land 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 brutal and barbaric invasions by foreigners for more than a thousand years. Many 'movements' to improve the situation have been initiated without any noticeable change.

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 role to play because we tend to follow one or more of these leaders. If one of them preaches violence, a crowd may attack the House of Representatives and Senate. If the Chief of Defense mistreats women soldiers and Prime Minister & Defense Minister shield him from investigation then other soldiers will be encouraged to exploit other women.

### Four *Yug*-s (periods)

In India, the history is divided in to 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 last and fourth period. In this period, less than 25% of the human population follows a life of morals & ethics. This proportion will diminish gradually and the world as we know, will be destroyed at the end this period.

### How can we improve the situation?

Unless vast majority of 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 to teach ethical behavior to someone  
but very easy to teach unethical or immoral behavior.*

*Hitopadesha, 2:16*

A radical change will need radical (not violent) thinking, planning and determined actions.

*“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 decide 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.

Most of the ideas and quotes are from the classics of ancient India. They were composed long before all the prophets established various religions. It was a way of life that was practiced and taught. This was called “*Dharma*” (*Dharma*). The word “*Dharma*” has no equivalent word in English. “*Sanātan Dharma*” (Eternal Dharma) or “*Mānav Dharma*” (morals, ethics or duties of Mankind) is not a religion because it was practiced long before all the Prophets established their different religions. It is a way of life. Everything we do in life, including eating and sleeping, are done according to *Dharma*. Other meaning of *Dharma* is ‘duty’ - one’s duty towards himself/herself, his/her family, community, country, and the world. It is a universal code of behavior towards all living creatures and even nonliving things. *Dharma* is in the best interest of all and includes all the virtues like truth, nonviolence, compassion, etc. It is also absence of negative tendencies like selfishness, lust, greed, envy, anger, arrogance, etc. *Dharma* sustains and supports life in general, and helps to hold the whole community (mankind) together.

## Whole World is a Family

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

*Ayam bandhuh ayam néti gaṇanām 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*

A basic concept, if adopted by the majority of people can 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. My hats off to these geniuses for their wisdom in improving lives of innumerable people without any expectation for monetary gain or fame.

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 language simple enough so that they can understand. It is recommended that readers read a small segment - a paragraph or one page - at a time. They should feel free to discuss with their parents or other knowledgeable adults. They may write to me at my e-mail address too. Contemplation on the material followed by practicing it in 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 common good of the society and the world and do not do any harm to anyone.

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 first edition for accuracy. I also appreciate comments and suggestions by my wife, Lila Mehta and daughter Angana Shroff.

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

This effort is dedicated to 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 अधो-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 and find it helpful.*

*Subhāshitani*

Arun J. Mehta

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## Table of Contents





## I. Dharma (धर्म)

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. “*Sanātan Dharma*” or “*Mānav Dharma*” is not a religion because no Prophet initiated or established it and it’s always evolving - not rigid or stagnant. In India it is labeled as a religion for political reason. It is ‘a way of life’. 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 label became important and ‘Hinduism’ became a religion. Religion has become a very divisive force in the modern world exploiting and intimidating people of ‘other’ religion, 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 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 eco-system  
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 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). 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.; not just in this life but beyond it too. It tells us our 'Purpose' in life by developing a perfect, noble personality (personal character).

### Dharma Shāstra (धर्म शास्त्र)

A *Shāstra* is 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 Dharmah* || 1.1.2 ||

*Vaishishika 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 the *Adhikari* (fit) 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, world would be a much better place for everyone.

## II. 'Védic', 'Sanātan' or 'Mānav' Dharma'

The *Sanskrit* root word *vid* means to know and *Véd* means (sacred) knowledge. There are four *Véd*-s: *Roog* (Rig), *Yajur*, *Sām*, and *Atharva*. *Véd*-s were revealed to *Rooshi*-s during meditation thousands of years ago. The knowledge of *Véd*-s is timeless. The end (*ant*) portion of *Véd*-s is called *Védānt* (*Véd* + *ant*). *Védānt* is also called *Upanishad*. The *Upanishad*-s are declarations of the highest spiritual truths and a guide for 'How to live your life'. Most of us ask our children to read *Bhagawad 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. *Bhagawad Gitā* is the cream of the *Upanishad*-s. Pearls of wisdom are also found in *Rāmāyan*, *Mahābhārat*, *Bhāgavat Purān*, etc.

*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 an 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* = Mankind (includes woman).

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

The original people of India were called *Āryan*-s or the 'noble ones' and the country was '*Āryāvart*'. The *Āryan*-s did not come from anywhere but had lived there for millennia and had developed an advanced civilization. Other names for their religion were – *Sanātan Dharma* (eternal religion), *Védic Dharma* (religion based on the *Véd*-s), *Ārya Dharma* (religion of the *Āryan*-s), or *Mānav Dharma* (religion of mankind). The name of the country 'India' was also coined by foreigners. The Indian names for India are '*Āryāvart*' (the land of *Āryan*-s) or '*Bhāratvarsha*' (the land of king Bharat). Nazis took this word, inverted a holy *Aryan* symbol of goodwill to all and created 'Swastika' for themselves. People of Jewish faith had migrated to India 2,000 years ago because of persecution in their homeland. They were allowed to live peacefully and maintain their tradition for two millennia. Oldest Synagogue still exists in Cochin, India.

The word 'Hindu' is not found in the *Véd*-s, the ancient scriptures of India. People living along the river Sindhu were called 'Hindus' by foreigners. River Sindhu flows from Himalaya Mountain in the North and through North Western part of what was India. Most of the foreign invaders came to India from the North-West. The religion followed by people of India was called "Hinduism" by the foreigners. This is similar to how the original people of North America were called 'Indians' by Europeans who were looking for 'India' and when they first arrived in America thought they were in India.

*Dharma* has two parts –

1. *Sāmāny Dharma* – duties that are common to all people.
2. *Vishésh Dharma* - is special duties of husband, wife, child, student, teacher, farmer, business person, king, soldier, etc. All these duties are described in ancient Indian literature. (More about *Vivésh Dharma* in Appendix III)

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.

### III. 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?

A system of ‘*Gurukul*’ schools existed in India before all the invasions 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 (*Varnāshram*) 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 scriptures, *Sanskrit* language, Indian culture and Indian history as myth or inferior or ‘*Sanskrit* as a dead’ (language)’. 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.

## 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 and is very important. 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 India 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 education of female children. *Véd-s* encourage women to undergo *Upanayana* - thread ceremony - that initiates them in *Védic* studies.

*“Parents should gift their daughter 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.

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