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श्री गणेशाय नमः

Védic Dharma

(Sanātan Dharma, Mānav Dharma or Hinduism)

by

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ISBN 978-0-9866155-04

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Please use this knowledge wisely, for the good of all, and pass it on to anyone who is genuinely interested in learning. Please send an e-mail to the author if you would like a hard copy.

Preface

Why write a book on ‘*Védic Dharma*’?

Ayam bandhuhu ayam néti gñāna laghuchetsām
Udāracharitānām tu vasudhaiva kutumbakam

Mahopanishada VI.72

A (spiritually) less evolved person says ‘This is a friend but that one is not.’
To a broad minded (spiritually evolved) person the whole world is a family.

“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

For some time I had been sending short e-mails to my friends and relatives about ancient Indian culture. Now I would like to share this with wider audience through this booklet.

I am not an expert in this field and am grateful to Dr. B. V. K. Sastry of International Védic Hindu University, Florida, USA for very helpful suggestions. He went over the draft for accuracy. I also appreciate comments and suggestions by my wife, Lila Mehta and daughter Angana Shroff. I have tried to present this material in language simple enough so that a busy high school or university student can understand.

In 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* words are in *italics*. Plural version of *Sanskrit* words e.g. *Védas*, is written with – before ‘s’, like *Véda-s*. Ā & ā are pronounced as in ‘bark’. é is pronounced as first ‘e’ in ‘level’ and í as Devnāgari ऀ (no equivalent 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.

Table of Contents

1. Dharma
2. 'Védic' 'Sanātan' or 'Mānav' Dharma
3. Origin of word 'Hindu'
4. Culture
5. Essence of our Culture
6. Goals or Purpose in Life
7. Our Basic Beliefs
8. Important Values
9. How can we preserve our cultural heritage?
10. Vedānta
11. Four Stages of Life
12. Four Pillars of the Society
13. Four Paths
14. Different Methods Prescribed for Personal Evolution
15. Three Gunās
16. Samskāra-s
17. Vivéka Buddhi
18. Yathā Yogyam Tathā Kuru
19. App. I – Some Interesting Quotes about India
20. App. II – Great Reformers of India – A Timeline

1. *Dharma*

The word “*Dharma*” has no equivalent word in English. It takes many English words to describe *Dharma*. The word ‘religion’ is commonly used but a religion is a specific system of institutionalized faith or worship. “*Sanātan Dharma*” or “*Mānav Dharma*” is not a religion but a way of life. Everything we do in life, including eating and sleeping, are done according to *dharma*.

The *Sanskrit* word *Dharma* is derived from the root word “*Dhri*” which means to hold together or support. *Dharma* supports or holds together everyone and everything. *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 - will help guide us 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 the universal code of behavior towards all living creatures and 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. *Dharma* sustains and supports life in general, and helps to hold the community together.

2. 'Védic', 'Sanātan' or 'Mānav' Dharma

The *Sanskrit* root word *vid* means to know and *Véda* means (sacred) knowledge. There are four *Véda*-s: *Roog*, *Yajur*, *Sāma*, and *Atharva*. *Véda*-s were revealed to *rooshi*-s 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 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 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 the mankind.

Dharma has two parts –

1. *Sāmānya Dharma* – duties that are common to all people.
2. *Vishesha 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.

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, countries wasting their resources after unethical projects and leading their families & people to disaster.

3. Origin of word 'Hindu'

The word 'Hindu' is not found in the *Véda-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.

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 of the *Védas*), *Ārya Dharma* (religion of the *Āryans*), or *Mānav Dharma* (religion of mankind). The name of the country 'India' was also coined by foreigners. The Indian names for India are '*Āryāvarta*' (the land of *Āryan-s*) or '*Bhāratvarsha*' (the land of king Bharat).

4. Culture

Culture has been defined in 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 behaviour”.

It may also include education, scientific and technological advances, customs of the people, and the way in which people interact with each other and live in a society.

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

How did it survive in India? A system of ‘*Gurukula*’ schools, strong family traditions, and the unique system of dividing the society into four classes with assigned duties for education, defence, trade, and service (*Varnāshram*) that helped maintain the knowledge and culture in India.

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

5. Essence of our Culture

We can not 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 the individual.

Our culture shows us how to live our life whether we are in India or North America or any where else. 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'. 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, ancestors, were of inferior quality or that 'they will burn in hell for eternity' because of their religion then they are likely to have many problems.

“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 for ever”

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

“ॐ *Ishāvāsyā-idam sarvam yat-kincha jagatyām jagat
Tena tyaktena bhunjithā mā grudah kasyasviddhanam*”

God lives in all this, the universe.

Enjoy what He gives you. Do not steal wealth of others.

The first part of the first *shloka* of ‘*Ishopanishada*’ tells us that ‘God lives in everything’ (in this universe). Love and respect all creatures and even inanimate objects. There is an ‘energy’ that forms the basis of all that exists in the universe, a ‘force’ that keeps us alive, something that can not be described nor can it be experienced by our senses (touch, smell, sight, hearing, and taste); an ‘entity’ that can be addressed by any name or imagined to take up any form, and ‘that’ which has no beginning or an end (definition of God).

6. Goals or Purpose in Life

“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.

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

1. *Kāma* (desire) – fulfilling desires to satisfy senses e.g. thirst, hunger, etc. These are common to all in the animal kingdom.
2. *Artha* (wealth) – earning money to buy food, shelter, etc. This goal is considered higher than *Kāma* because it is not found in animal kingdom.
3. *Dharma* – *Kāma* and *Artha* are achieved according to *Dharma*. It is higher than both of them.
4. *Moksha* – liberation from the cycle of birth and death or merging of *Ātmā* (soul) with *Paramātmā* (God). This is the highest goal in life. All activities in the fields of *Kāma* and *Artha* give temporary pleasure. *Moksha* is permanent bliss. According to *Védanta* 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.

Pranavah dhanuhu sharah hee ātmā
Brahma tat lakshyam uchryate
Apramattena veddhavyam
Shara-vat tanmayah bhavet.

Mundakopnishad II.ii.4

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

7. Our Basic Beliefs

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

a. ***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 our body. This energy can not be damaged or destroyed. It is the same in all living things. *Paramātmā* is the ocean of life-force from which all *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).

b. ***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 of that action (*Karma-phala*). An ‘action’ is good if the intention is unselfish and methods used are nonviolent (according to *Dharama*). We do not have any control over what follows the ‘action’ (the consequences). Every act or even a thought has similar consequences. ‘Good’ thoughts and ‘good’ actions have ‘good’ consequences. We have choice only over our intentions and the means used to perform any action. If we do something for others with good intentions and without expecting anything in return for ourselves, good things will eventually happen to us. It is essential that we analyze our intentions continuously, do our best, work hard, perceive, and leave the results to Him.

c. ***Punarjanma*** (Rebirth)

Vāsānsi jirnāni yathā vihāya

Navāni gruhnāti naroparāni

Tathā sharirāni vihāya jirnāni

Anyāni samyāti navāni dehi.

Bhagawad Gitā, II. 22.

Just as we discard old clothes and

Man takes new (clothes)

In the same way (we) discard old bodies

(And we) obtain new bodies.

We believe that the soul leaves the body at the time of death and takes up another body (reincarnates). 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 attain liberation from the cycle of birth and death (*Moksha*). Everyone, even an animal, is entitled to *moksha*.

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.

8. Important Values

Satya (truth), *Ahimsā* (nonviolence), and *Brahmacharya* (discipline, self-control) are some of the important values for people who follow *Mānav Dharma*.

Satyén labhyah tapasā hee éshah
Samyak-gnānena brahmacharyéna nityam

(The Self realization) is experienced through constant practice of truth, self-discipline, and (life according to) the right knowledge (the highest wisdom, *Dharma*)

Antah-shariré jyotirmayah hee shubhrah
Yam pashhyanti yatayah kshina-doshaha.

(A person,) who has reduced all his faults (impurities) to the minimum (and purified himself), sees the luminous Self within himself.

Mundakopnishad, III.i.5

1. Truth (*Satya*)

The official seal of India says:

Satyam éva jayate.

Truth only prevails.

There are three meanings of the word ‘truth’:

- a. The dictionary meaning of truth is ‘what is real’.
- b. Second meaning of truth is ‘when our speech and actions are the same as our thoughts’.
- c. In *Véda-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, some thing that does not change over time. That ‘Truth’ is changeless, beginning less, endless, *Paramātmā* (God, the Supreme Power).

The first two (a and b) are to be practiced. The third one is a goal to be achieved. Different meanings of ‘Truth’ can be confusing.

*Satyam bruyāt, priyam bruyāt, na bruyāt satyam, apriyam.
Priyam cha nānutrum bruyād, ésha dharmah sanātanah.*

Manu Smruti, IV.138

Speak the truth. Say (use) pleasant (words). Do not tell the truth in unpleasant words.
Do not say pleasant but untrue (words). This is the *Sanātana Dharma*.

Speak only that which is true, kind, helpful and necessary. If we believe in '*Ishā vāsya idam sarvam*' (God lives in all), how can we cheat anyone who has God within him by telling untruth?

2. Nonviolence (*Ahimsā*)

'Ahimsā paramo dharmā'

Nonviolence is the supreme dharma.

If we believe in '*Ishā vāsya idam sarvam*' (God lives in all), how can we hurt anyone?

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, or 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 be some day 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

'Ahimsā paramo dharmā, dharmā himsā cha.'

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

3. Self-discipline (*Brahmacharya*)

Brahmacharya means search for *Brahman* or moving towards *Brahman*, the changeless, beginning less, endless, God. It can also mean moving around in the field of *Brahman* or behavior of some one who wants to attain *Brahman*.

Brahmacharya is learnt during first 25 years of life and practiced all through the life. The main goal during this stage of life is to learn. 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 necessary. The student learns to control all his/her senses (taste, smell, touch, vision and hearing).

It does not mean that later on in life, 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 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, or reading trashy books, etc).

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

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

Following Védic values are also recommended:

Abhayam, sattva-shamshuddhihi, jnāna yoga vyavasthitihi;
Dānam, damah, cha yagnah, cha svādhyāyah, tapah, ārjavam.

Ahimsā, satyam, akrodhah, tyāgah, shāntihi, apaishunam;
Dayā bhuteshu, aloluptvam, mārđavam, hri, achapalam.

Tejah, kshamā, dhritihi, shaucham, adhrohah, na atimānita;
Bhavanti sampadam daivim abhijātasya Bharata.

Bhagavad Gita, XVI. 1, 2,& 3.

Life according to these values and virtues are useful for our progress on the evolutionary path to experiencing the 'Divine' or 'Self Realization'.

4. Fearlessness (*Abhayam*). Fear interferes with good decision making.
5. Purity of thoughts (*Satva-shamshuddhi*). Removal of impurities listed below.
6. Yoga of knowledge (*Jnāna yoga vyavasthiti*). Decisions and actions are based on the knowledge of morals & ethics, and right & wrong.
7. Charity (*Dāna*). People and institutions doing work for the good of the society are supported by generous donations of money and time.
9. Mastery over all senses (*Dama, Brahmacharya*). 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. (Same as # 3 above)
10. Personal sacrifice (*Yagna*). Desires for personal pleasures, power, prestige, possessions, etc. are given up for the good of the family, community & country.
11. Study of scriptures (*Svādhāya*). Regular study of scriptures is necessary for our spiritual development and to keep us on the right track.
12. Disciplined effort (*Tapa*) towards a selfless cause.
13. Honesty (*Ārjava*).
14. Nonviolence (*Ahimsā*). (Same as # 2 above).
15. Truth (*Satya*). (Same as # 1 above).
16. Absence of Anger (*Akrodha*). Good decisions can not be made under the influence of anger. Actions undertaken in the moment of anger may lead to disaster.
17. Renunciation (*Tyāga*) of fruits of all activities. Not insisting on any particular result, or becoming very anxious about the result or becoming paralyzed after failure.
14. Peace of mind (*Shānti*) is necessary for good decisions and behavior.
15. *Apaishunam* (straight forward nature, truthful & pleasant speech).
16. *Dayā* (love and tenderness towards all).
17. Refrain from excessive indulgence in activities for personal pleasure (*Aloluptvam*).
18. Gentle and mild behavior (*Mārdavam*).
19. Modesty in all speech and actions. Remorse for any inappropriate actions, speech or thoughts (*Hri*).
20. A steady mind and deliberate decision making (*Achapalam*) before any action.
21. Person with divine qualities has a special 'glow' on her face and has lots of energy for selfless service (*Tejah*).
22. Forgiveness (*Kshamā*).
23. Steadfast (*Dhruti*), a quality to maintain a course of action once decision is made.

24. Purity (*Shaucha*) of thoughts and cleanliness of the body.
25. Without any desire to harm anyone or cheat (*Adhrohah*).
26. Devoid of excessive pride (*Na-atimānita*).

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

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

1. Hypocrisy (*Dambha*), pretending to be better than one really is.
 2. Arrogance (*Darpa*) of knowledge, colour of the skin, family, wealth, physical strength, etc..
 3. False or excessive pride, hostile intention (*Abhiman*).
 4. Anger (*Krodha*).
 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.
- These six are considered as devilish (*Āsuric*) characteristics or impurities in the mind of a person. Everyone has to try and remove these from their personality.

9. 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

- a. Learn, Practice, and Teach. We, adults, have to set a good example by learning about our heritage and culture and put it in practice.
- b. Enroll children in *Balvihar* classes (Sunday schools that teach our languages, heritage, and culture).
- c. Pray or recite *shloka*-s in the early morning, evening and before meals.
- d. Read Indian classics like *Rāmāyana*, *Mahābharat*, *Bhagawad Gitā*, etc. to children.
- e. Speak to children in at least one Indian language.
- f. 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.
- g. *Bhāratnātyam* dance is based on our heritage. Encourage children to learn *Bhāratnātyam*.
- h. Perform simple *Puja* at home and explain the meaning of the ceremony. Celebrate festivals and observe various *Samskāra*-s. Visit a local temple.
- i. 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.
- j. 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.

10. 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 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*. It is up to the age of 25 years. The main goal of this stage is to gain knowledge and practice self-discipline (*Tapa*). Everyone 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 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, or computers with CD-ROM and internet. This period was devoted to learning scriptures, literature, arts, math, and sciences.

Duties of a Student

The students respected their *guru* and *gurupatni* (*guru's* wife) and followed all their instructions. The *guru*, his family, and all the students lived a very simple life without any complaints. The students helped 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 boy friend or girl friend, or worry about 'who will go with me on the Prom night'.

Duties of a Teacher

The *guru's* responsibility was to guide his/her students with love, kindness and affection 1000 times more than a father. He had the patience to remove all doubts even if he had 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 by listening, observation, and practicing them in their own life. In *Védantic* tradition the teacher did not ask for any money for his services. The king and voluntary contributions by the wealthy in the community supported the *guru*.

*Atha yat tapo dānam ārjavam ahimsā,
Satyavachanam iti tā asya dakshinā.*

Chhāndogya Upanishad

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

Today 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 see 18 or 20 year olds getting married. Talk to them and see how difficult it becomes to study. 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.

Graduation Speech

The graduation speech by the *guru* outlines the duties of the next stage of life *Gruhasthāshram* (the householder).

Graduation speech from *Taittiriya Upanishad*, is as follows:

Practice what is right. (Live according to *Dharma*.)

Study the scriptures and teach them too.

Live up to the ideals learnt in *Gurukula* (boarding school). Let the speech and actions be the same as the ideals accepted by the mind & intellect.

Personal sacrifice and disciplined effort are required of the householder.

The householder has complete control over his senses.

He works for peace and prosperity of the family and the community.

Fire signifies knowledge. Fire in the kitchen is necessary for preparing food. The householder works so that there is food in the house and knowledge in the family and community.

Daily *puja* (worship) is performed by the family as a reminder of the *Dharma*.

Guests are welcomed with warmth and treated generously.

Take care of the needs of the community, country, and the world.

Having children and bringing them up is a major time consuming duty of the husband & wife.

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

2. *Gruhasthāshram*

After the age of 25, men and women get married, have children and earn money to support the family and the community. This stage of life is called “*Gruhasthāshram*”. It

is a time for selfless service (*Yagna*). Needs of the family are taken care of first and then it is extended to friends, community, and the country. The husband and wife are expected to love and respect each other. Their major responsibility is to bring up children who have noble (*Āryan*) characteristics and who in turn will become good citizens.

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

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

Manu Smruti, 3.56

Wealth is acquired and spent according to *Dharma*. Support of children, elderly, and the community is also the duty of people in this stage of life. Teachers are given the greatest respect and supported by generous contributions. *Dāna* (charity) is given to deserving poor. Free time is spent in keeping up *Abhyāsa* (study) of scriptures and *Satsanga* (good company).

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 *Svādhyāya* or serious study of scriptures and preparing for the ultimate goal in life - which is union (*Yog*) with God or *Brahman*. One begins to 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 reduced, life is simplified, and most time is devoted to *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. Any one 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 *Tyāga* or renunciation.

11. Four Pillars of the Society – the Caste System

The ancient society in India was divided in to four groups according to their capabilities, aptitudes, education, personal effort (*sādhanā*), 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. Everyone was expected to live according to the *dharma* of their category.

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

*Brāhmana-kshatriya-visham shudrānām cha Parantap
Karmāni pravibhaktani svabhāva-prabhaivah gunaihi*

O Parantap (Arjun), the responsibilities (duties) of brāhmanas, kshatriyas, vaishyas, and shudras are distributed according to qualities they are born with.

Bhagavad Gitā, XVIII.41

1. *Brāhmana-s* (Brahmins)

*Shamah, damah, tapah, shaucham, kshāntihi, ārjavam, eva cha
Gnānam, vignānam, āstikyam, brahmakarma 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 *brāhman* (brāhmin).

Bhagavad Gitā, XVIII.42

Brāhman-s were the intellectuals who became teachers and preachers. They learnt the scriptures and other arts and sciences, spent their lives running residential schools and performing religious ceremonies (*yagna*). Preservation of *Védic* traditions and knowledge was their duty. *Brāhmana-s* were very spiritual and lived a simple life following the highest moral and ethical principles to set good example for the rest of the society. They were supported by the king, the wealthy, and the parents of 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. *Kshatriya-s*

*Shauryam, tejah, dhritihi, dākshyam yuddhe cha api apalāyanam
Dānam, ishvaryabhāvah cha kshātram karma svabhāvjam*

Kshatriyas are brave, (have) powerful personality, (can) make firm decisions, (have) ability to fight in war, (do) not withdraw from battle field, generous, and of royal behavior.

Bhagavad Gitā, XVIII.43

Kshatriya-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 *Kshatriya-s* would be in the army.

3 &4. *Vaishya-s & Shudra-s*

Krushhi-gaurakshya-vanijyam vaishya-karma svabhāvajam
Parichayrātmakam karma shudrasyāpi svabhāvjam

Agriculture, taking care of cows, and trade are the responsibilities of *Vaishya-s*.

Service is the duty of *Shudra-s*.

Bhagavad Gitā, XVIII.44

The third category was *Vaishya-s* who were farmers, businessmen, and other trades people. The financial welfare of the society depended on them.

The fourth division was called *Shudra-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 India was a *Shudra*.

12. 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 (Raj 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 Vivékananda

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.

The four paths are:

1. *Bhakti Yog* – path of devotion
2. *Karma Yog* – path of action
3. *Gnāna 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 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 Krushna as if He was her husband. In the end she was prepared to take poison rather than give up her devotion to Krushna.

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

1. *Shravana* - listening to scriptures, *bhajans*, etc.
2. *Kirtana* - singing *bhajans*, *shlokas*, etc.
3. *Smarana* – remembering and recalling holy names e.g. *Vishnusahasranām* (thousand names of God)
4. *Pāda sévana* – service at the feet of God in a temple
5. *Archanā* – ritual *puja*
6. *Vandanā* – complete surrender (prostration) in front of a *murti*
7. *Dāsya* – being a servant of God
8. *Sākhya* – intimate friendship with God.

9. *Ātma-nivédana* – total and continuous surrender to God or *Samādhi* merging with God.

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). Every thought, word, and act has 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. The only control we have is on 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 action is performed according to *Dharma*, without anxiety for the result, and all credit for the outcome is give to *Paramātmā* (God) in all humility.

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

*Karmānyéva adhikārah mā phaléshu kadāchana
Mā karma-phala-hetur-bhuhu mā té sangah astu akarmani*

Performance of action is (your) only right. (You) may not get the fruits (results that you expected or when you expected).
Do not work for the fruits of action. Do not keep company of inaction (not doing anything is not an option).

Bhagavad Gitā Chap. II.47

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

*Yah tu indriyāni manasā niyamya ārbhaté, Arjun
Karméndriyaihi karmayogam asaktah vishishyaté*

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

Bhagavad Gitā, III.7

*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

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 unselfish and methods used do not harm others. We have a choice in selection of our thoughts and actions. We do not have any control over what follows the ‘action’ (the consequences). Every act or even 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, persevere, and leave the results to Him.

“In regard to every action one must know the result 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

*Atho khalvāhuhu kāmamaya evāyam purusha eeti sa yathākrāmo bhavati
tatkṛaturbhavati tatkarma kurutēpatkarma kurutē tad-abhisampadhyatē.*

Bṛuhadāraṇyaka IV. 4.5

Our strong desire is the basis for our decisions and driving force behind our actions. We get results according to our actions. Thus our desires and actions determine our destiny.

Karma yog is a way of life. It purifies the mind by removing ‘*vāsanā-s*’ (strong, deep desires) and helps improve concentration in meditation.

3. *Gnāna* (knowledge) *Yog*

Is the path of intellectual inquiry. The root word *gna* means ‘to know’. *Gnāna* means knowledge. *Vignāna* is used for special knowledge - something more than ordinary knowledge. In scriptures *Vignāna* 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 *Gnāna Yog* without the moral values can be very misleading and dangerous.

We can deny the existence of everything and everyone but we can not deny the existence of our own self. The intellectual inquiry starts with the question about “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. *Shravana* – listening to a *guru* and reading scriptures.

2. *Manana* – contemplation on what *guru* and scriptures have taught and on questions like “What is the ‘Truth’?”, “Why am I here?”, “What is the ultimate goal in life?”, “How should I lead my life?”, “What is ‘soul’?”, “What happens after death?” etc. The knowledge gained from this self-analysis may ultimately lead to ‘Self-realization’.
3. *Nididhyāsana* – the contemplation on above questions leads to deeper and deeper understanding of mind, ego, and the divine reality (Brahman). Ultimately it may lead to the destruction of individual ego and union with the *Brahman* (the universal force).

4. Rāj Yog

is also known as *Astānga Yog* or *Kriya Yog*. The goal of *Rāj Yoga* is to destroy the ego and develop intense concentration. In the twelfth chapter of Bhagawad Gita, Arjun asks Shri Krushna “Who is better – a devotee who worships a God with a physical form or one who meditates on the formless, absolute God? Shri Krushna explains that those who can contemplate on a formless, indestructible, changeless God; should follow that path. Those who prefer to worship God with 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. *Yama-s* (restraints) – are nonviolence (*ahimsā*), truthfulness (*satya*), control over all senses (*brahmacharya*), not taking anything that belongs to others (*aparigraha*).
2. *Niyama-s* (rules or practices) – are cleanliness of body and mind (*soucha*), contentment (*santosha*), disciplined effort (*tapa*), study of scriptures (*svādhyāya*), search for God or surrender to God as the top priority (*Ishwara Pranidhāna*).

The first two steps (*yama-s* & *niyama-s*) are common requirements for all paths – *Bhakti*, *Karma*, *Gnāna*, & *Raj yog*.

3. *Āsana-s* – yoga postures that are now being taught all over the world is a part of this *yog*.
4. *Prānāyāma* – control of breathing by various exercises and techniques.
5. *Pratyāhāra* – is control of senses or reducing input from all sense organs and thoughts about external objects.
6. *Dhāraṇa* – 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. *Dhyāna* – is 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 individual ego and feels one with Brahman (God).

13. 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. **Āshrama-s** (stages of life) – Performing duties prescribed for each stage of life. *Āshramas* teach us:
 - I. **Tapa** (disciplined effort) in *Brahmacharyāshram* – first 25 years of life.
 - II. **Yagna** (selfless service) in *Gruhasthāshram* – age 25 to 50.
 - III. **Abhyāsa** more detailed study of scriptures in *Vānaprasthāshram* – 50 to 75 years.
 - IV. **Sanyāsa** is *tyāga* or renunciation of all attachments to worldly things & people in *Sanyāsāshram* – last stage of life.
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. **Gnāna Yog** – Path of Knowledge
 - IV. **Rāj Yog** – Path of Meditation
3. **Gunā-s** – (basic characteristics of each individual) trying to evolve from *tamas* to *rajas* to *sattva* (Chapter 14).
4. **Sanskāra-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 15).
5. **Deva-s** (deities) – each of our deity has some characteristics that we can emulate. Depending on our weakness we can select appropriate deity. For example if we need strength we can worship *Hanumanji* or *Durgamātā* and work towards the goal of getting strong and brave.
6. **Festivals** – there is a meaning or reason for celebrating a festival. Learning about this can show us a path to further evolution.
7. **Rituals** – There are lessons behind each *pujā* or *kathā*.
8. **Abhyāsa** – study of *Bhagavad Gitā*, *Rāmāyana*, etc. and learning from them.
9. **Satsanga** – keeping good company and learning from each other.
10. **Japa** – repetition of a mantra or holy name.
11. **Dhyāna** - Meditation
12. **Yātrā** – visiting holy places. Holy places have an effect of making us more spiritual.
13. **Vrata** – is resolution. Some resolve to ‘not eat salt’, or ‘fast’ or ‘not speak’ on certain days. This practice improves our will power.

14. Three *Gunā*-s

There are three main characteristics or qualities (*guna*-s) to describe all our thoughts, speech, and actions. They are called *Sattva*, *Rajas*, and *Tamas*. There are no equivalent English words. They may be very roughly translated as good (*Deva*, god-like), passionate (*Rākshasa*), and bad (*Asura*). They are like three primary colors – when they are mixed in different proportions they can make all the other colors. All three *gunā*-s exist in all of us in different proportions and create millions of different individual and unique personalities.

The other meaning of *gunā* is rope, a rope that binds our *ātmā* 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 *gunā*-s help us analyze our own personality, determine our own weaknesses, and take corrective action so that each individual characteristic changes from *tāmasic* to *rājasic* to *sātvic* *gunā*. This can be a road map for our evolutionary path to Self-realization or *Moksha*. All of us are capable of improving ourselves. All of us have all three *gunā*-s in different proportions in our thoughts, speech, and actions. No one is perfect and everyone is changing all the time.

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 in sleeping, eating, and excreting.

People with this tendency are ignorant of spiritual knowledge or higher values. This is described as total darkness in the mind. They arrive at wrong decisions in life because of this ignorance (*avidyā*) and disorganized thinking. *Tāmasic vrutti* (tendency) 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* is black.

2. *Rajas*

A *rājasic* person has lots of selfish desires for acquiring worldly goods, ambition for wealth, power, and 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* is red.

3. *Sattva*

A *sāttvic* 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 *sāttvic* person is anxious for peace and happiness for all and desire for true knowledge and wisdom. This desire, however noble, still creates attachment. For Moksha one has to go beyond this attachment of *sattva* to happiness & knowledge.

Evolve from *Tamas* to *Rajas* to *Sattva*

All of us are working under one of the *guna* 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 *sattva* 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 (*sankalpa*) 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 and work on them to change to *rājasic* to *sāttvic*.

Activities according to *Gunā-s*

1. Long term goals:

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

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

Sāttvic - 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.

Sāttvic – 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 Gitā, 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 they may lead to sorrow & depression.

Bhagawad Gitā, XVIII.24, 27

Sāttvic – 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. *Sāttvic* person remains calm in success or failure.

Bhagawad Gitā, XVIII.23, 26

4. Food (*Bhagawad Gitā* XVII.7-10)

Type of food

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

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

Sāttvic – 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, etc.

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

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

Place

Tāmasic – person eats in bar filled with smoke.

Rājasic – person likes fancy restaurant.

Sāttvic – person prefers to eat at home or in temple.

Quantity

Tāmasic – consumes a lot of food.

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

Sāttvic – person will eat just enough to maintain healthy body.

Time

Tāmasic – eats at irregular hours or eats lying down.

Rājasic – eats while working or walking.

Sāttvic - eats quietly, slowly, regularly.

Drink

Tāmasic – individual takes recreational drugs and drinks alcoholic beverages.

Rājasic – drinks excitable caffeinated beverages.

Sāttvic – prefers water, fruit juice, etc.

5. Sleep

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

Rājasic – has difficulty sleeping and has excitable dreams.

Sāttvic – enjoys restful, sound sleep.

6. Speech

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

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

Sāttvic – person thinks & then tells the truth (*satyam*) in pleasant words (*priyam*), and what is beneficial to all (*hitam*). Her speech is encouraging and uplifting.

7. 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 moral dilemma.

Sāttvic – person knows ‘right’ from ‘wrong’, what is according to *dharma*, and what is good for all and which brings long-term security.

Bhagawad Gitā XVIII.30-32

8. Pleasure is derived from:

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

Rājasic – individual feels happy during activities that give pleasure from sense gratification. Activity feels like fun in the beginning but ends up in grief later (*Préyas*).

Sāttvic – person is involved in activities that are good for all. This may be difficult in the beginning but brings long lasting pleasure & peace to all (*Shréyas*).

Bhagawad Gitā XVIII.37-39

9. 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.

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

10. Reading, listening to music, watching movies

Tāmasic – like trashy, vulgar, and violent entertainment.

Rājasic – prefers exciting literature and movies.

Sāttvic – read, listen, and watch value based entertainment.

11. 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 their own body, and without giving *dakshinā* (gift to Brahmin).

Rājasic – individual performs rituals to gain personal prestige, profit, or power. *Dakshinā* is given to *Brahmana*-s to show off wealth.

Sāttvic – person performs obligatory rituals with proper understanding of the meaning of mantras, without expecting anything in return, and resolve to put them in practice. Generous *dakshinā* is given with love and respect.

12. Charity (*Dāna*):

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

Rājasic – person regrets when he has to give *dāna* or gives to gain something in return.

Sāttvic - gives willingly, with faith and humility, to the right 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

13. Knowledge:

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

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

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

Bhagawad Gitā XVIII.20-22

14. Three characters (brothers) from *Rāmāyana*:

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

Rājasic – brother is *Rāvana*. He was very intelligent, knowledgeable, strong, and brave but had weakness for *Sita* who was married to *Rāma*.

Sāttvic – brother is *Vibhishana*. He left *Rāvana* and joined forces with *Rāma* to fight with his brother *Rāvana*, who had abducted *Sita*.

15. *Tapa* (Disciplined effort):

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

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

Sāttvic – person performs *tapa* to worship *devas* with faith and unselfish motive.

Bhagawad Gitā XVII.14-16

16. Temperament:

Tāmasic – individual is lethargic and vengeful.

Rājasic – is restless and ambitious.

Sāttvic – is calm and focused.

17. *Tyāga* (renunciation of fruits of action):

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

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

Sāttvic – persons carry out all their duties without selfish desire for personal gain and without fear for difficulty of the task.

Bhagawad Gitā XVIII.9-10.

18. Worship:

Tāmasic – worship ghosts.

Rājasic – *Yaksha*-s and *Rākshasa*-s

Sāttvic – worship *Devā*-s

Bhagawad Gitā XVII.4

15. Samskāra-s

Life is a sacred journey. So each milestone is celebrated by performing a sacred ceremony. Family and friends get together, lending support, advice and encouragement. *Samskāra-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 *Sanskāra-s* for different milestones in life from conception to the last rites.

Some of the important *Sanskāra-s* are:

Simantonayana is performed between the sixth and eighth month of pregnancy. Family takes special care of expectant mother during pregnancy since physical and mental development of the fetus is dependant on 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. What she eats, drinks, thinks, watches, hears, reads, affect the baby very much.

Nāmakaran

When the baby is between 6 – 11 days old, the father whispers the baby's name in the right ear. 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 baby's parents for this ceremony. Personal names have meanings or 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.

Upanayana

The sacred thread ceremony is also known as *Yagnopaveet*. The sacred thread has three strands to remind the child of his/her responsibilities towards the Guru, parents, and the community or nation. This ceremony is performed at the age 7 or 8 years when the child is ready to learn the scriptures (*Vēdas*) and the child is introduced to *Brahmacharyāshram*. 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 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 *Sapta padi* (seven steps) ceremony before getting married.

Antyesti

Is the last *samskāra*, a farewell to the departed *ātmā* (soul).

16. Vivéka Buddhi

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

The interaction between body, mind, intellect, and conscience are compared with prince *Arjun* sitting in a chariot with five horses driven by *Shri Krushna*. The horses are our five senses. If we do not have any control over our senses, we can be driven off a cliff. Our mind is the reins that control the senses (horses). The reins are in the hands of *Shri Krushna* or our *vivéka buddhi* or conscience. He guides the senses through our mind. We all can develop this *vivék buddhi*. It takes in to consideration past experiences and a long-term view of possible outcomes of any action. What looks like a pleasant (*préyas*) and easy path may not be in the best interest of all (*shréyas*).

Some of the factors that interfere with *vivék buddhi* are:

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

How to develop ‘*vivék buddhi*’? (*Bhagawad Gitā*, II.62, 63; III.40 – 43).

- a. Have a vision – where do you want to be at the end of the journey.
- b. Give up personal likes & dislikes for people and things. (*Bhagawad Gitā*, II.68,69; III.34)
- c. Remove mental impurities mentioned in # 2 above because they interfere with good decisions. This can be achieved at:
 - i. 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 Universal Consciousness). Contemplation and meditation on this concept helps.
 - ii. Emotional level – by developing love and faith in the Supreme (*Bhakti Yog*).
 - iii. Physical level – by selfless service (*Sewa*).
- d. Know your duties for your stage and station in life.
- e. Perform actions for the welfare of all (*Bhagawad Gitā* III.19, 20), according to *dharma*, and with an attitude of service
- f. Accept results as a ‘*prasād*’ (blessings from God), give credit to and dedicate them to the Lord (*Bhagawad Gitā*, IX.27).
- g. Analyze all thoughts, words, and deeds – why, how, what next, etc.

17. Yathā Yogyam Tathā Kuru

In the end do what you think is appropriate.

*Uddharet ātmanā ātmānam na ātmānam avasādyet
Ātmā eva hee ātmanah bandhu ātmā eva ripuhu ātmanah*

You can lift yourself up (but) do not degrade yourself.
You only are your (true) friend and you are your enemy.

Bhagawad Gitā, VI.5

In the last chapter *Shri Krushna* in *Bhagawad Gitā* tells Arjun:

“Vimrushya etat asheshana yathā icchasi tathā kuru”

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

Bhagawad Gitā, XVIII.63

“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 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 to be 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.”

Gautam Buddha

Best wishes for a very fruitful and enlightening journey.

ॐ *Shantihi Shantihi 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.”

Appolonius Tyanaeus, Greek thinker and traveler 1st Century CE

“Whenever I have read any part of the Védas, I have felt that some unearthly and unknown light illuminated me. In the greatest teachings of the Védas, 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 Durant, American Historian (1885 – 1981)

“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, 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 grand mother of tradition. Our most valuable and most instructive materials in the history of man are treasured up in India only."

Mark Twain, American author

"The Bhagavad-Gita 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

"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

Véda-s are timeless scriptures that were revealed to *Rooshi-s* (sages) and passed on from one generation to the next by repetition and memorizing. Great *Rooshi-s* did not leave their names or claimed copyright. Research scholars have developed new chronologies based on position of stars as described in *Véda-s* and *Purana-s*. For example, a *Roog Védic* verse describes winter solstice at Aries that correlates to around 6500 BCE (8,500 years ago). Scholars, from East and West, now believe the *Roog Véda* 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, South East Asian, Eastern Mediterranean countries and India since prehistoric times.

5000 BCE – Well planned cities developed along *Sindhu* and *Saraswati* rivers

3100 BCE - *Mahābhārat* war – *Dharma* is taught by *Shri Krushna* to *Arjun* and recorded by *Véd Vyās* as *Bhagawad Gitā*. People were performing rituals to obtain wealth and power for themselves. Some *pandits* were wasting time on philosophical and religious discussions. *Bhagawad 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 - *Sindu-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 nose.

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

563 to 483 BCE - *Gautam Buddha* is 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 ‘eight fold path’ consisting of right thought, right speech, right action etc.

321 BCE - *Maurya* dynasty rules over 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 is born in a Hindu family. Hindus were divided by caste etc. and were being persecuted by Muslims. He taught equality of all and his followers later advocated carrying Kirpan for self-defense.

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

1863 to 1902 - Swami Vivekānanda introduced Europe and USA to Vedānta and Yoga and spoke at The Parliament of World's Religions in Chicago (1893). He later started Rāmakrishna Mission.

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

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