

Chapter II. Divine Versus Worldly Dharma

Dharma cannot be restricted to any particular society or nation, for it is closely bound with the fortunes of the entire living world. It is a flame of light that can never be extinguished. It is untrammelled in its beneficent action. Krishna taught the *Gita* to Arjuna, but He intended it for the whole of humanity. Arjuna was just an excuse. That very *Gita* is today correcting all mankind. It is not for any particular caste, religion, or nation; it is the very breath for humans everywhere.

Dharma expresses itself in a variety of forms. Sometimes, it is known by the people who codified it, like *Manu-dharma*, sometimes by the group that followed it, like caste-*dharma*, sometimes by the stage of life to which it is applied, like householder-*dharma*, and so forth. But these are subsidiary practical details and not the fundamental norm. The *Atma-dharma*, the divine *dharma*, is what I am speaking of.

Practical *dharma*, or rules of good behaviour (*achara-dharma*), relates to temporary matters and problems and physical needs, to one's passing relationships with the objective world. The very instrument of those rules, the human body, is itself not permanent, so how then can these *dharma* be eternal? How can their nature be described as true? The Eternal cannot be expressed by the evanescent; truth cannot reveal itself in untruth; light cannot be procured from darkness. The Eternal can emerge only from the Eternal; truth can emanate only from truth. Therefore, the objective codes of *dharma* relating to worldly activities and daily life, though important in their own sphere, have to be followed with the full knowledge and consciousness of the inner basic *Atma-dharma*. Then only can the internal and external urges cooperate and yield the bliss of harmonious progress.

If, in your daily avocations, you translate the real values of eternal *dharma* into love-filled acts, then your duty to the inner reality, the *Atma-dharma*, is also fulfilled. Always build your living on the *Atmic* base; then, your progress is assured.

See the stone as God

Making God into stone, that is the effort being made today! How can such effort lead to truth when the real task is to see the stone as God? First, the form of the Godhead has to be meditated upon and imprinted on the consciousness; then, that form has to be conceived within the stone and the stone forgotten in the process, until the stone is transformed into God. In the same way, you have to imprint on your consciousness the basic *dharma*, the fundamental fact of *Atma* as the only entity; then, filled with that faith and vision, you have to deal with the manifold world of objects, its attractions and impingements. The ideal can be realized only thus. If this is done, there is no danger of the authentic meaning getting diluted or of *Atma-dharma* losing its lustre.

What happens when a stone is worshiped as God? The unlimited, the ever-present, the all-pervading-immanent entity, the Absolute, is visualized in the particular, in the concrete. Similarly, *dharma* that is universal, equal, and free can be spotted and tested in a single concrete act. Do not be misled by the idea that this is not possible. Don't you accomplish many difficult things, things that only increase your anxiety and fear? If one is wise, can't one take up instead things that are more worthwhile, things that give peace of mind?

Follow divine dharma and be free

To be free is your birthright, not to be bound. It is only when you guide your steps along the path illumined by the universal unbound *dharmā* that you are really free; if you stray away from the light, you get bound and you are caught.

Some might raise a doubt: How can *dharmā*, which sets limits on thoughts and words and regulates and controls, make a person free? “Freedom” is the name that you give to a certain type of bondage. Genuine freedom is obtained only when delusion is absent, when there is no identification with the body and senses, no servitude to the objective world. People who have escaped from this servitude and achieved freedom in the genuine sense are very few in number. Bondage lies in every act done with the consciousness of the body as the Self, for one is then the plaything of the senses. Only those who have escaped this fate are free; this “freedom” is the ideal stage to which *dharmā* leads. With this stage constantly in mind, one who engages in the activity of living can become a liberated person (*muktha-purusha*).

It is only because you bind yourself that you become bound and stray away from the *dharmic* path. It is always so; no other person can bind you; you do it yourself. If faith in God’s omnipresence is deep-rooted, you would be aware that He is your self and that you could never be bound! For that faith to grow, you must grasp *Atmic* bliss firmly. The reality of the *Atma* is the bedrock, the incontrovertible wisdom (*nishchitha-jnana*). Devoid of that foundation, you become the target of doubt, despair, and delusion. The maid of *dharmā* will not wed such.

Therefore, first endeavour to become free. That is to say, as a preliminary to successful living, cultivate faith in the *dharmā* as the core of your personality and then learn and practise the discipline necessary to reach down to that core. With that qualification acquired, you can engage fully in worldly activities, following the *dharmā* prescribed for their regulation. Then you become a moral individual (*dharmā-purusha*).

Those who hold the physical objective world as the all of life and the body as the Self lead wasted lives, live as meaningless as making God into stone. Making the stone into God is the holier, more wholesome task. So too, seeing divine duty (*Atma-dharmā*) in an act transforms it into an act of worship, elevates it, and removes its binding characteristic. Performing the duties of worldly life with no regard to genuine practice of the law of truth (*sathya-dharmā*) is as unholy as treating God as stone.

Good behaviour (*achara-dharmā*) pursued apart from the law of truth and the law of truth divorced from good behaviour are both barren of results. Good behaviour and the law of truth are inextricably intertwined and should be treated as such. The senior officer needs the work of the junior official as much as the junior official needs the help of the senior officer. Who, then, is the bound one and who the free? Both are bound to their desire to be happy and comfortable. Until the fundamental secret of the *Atma* is recognized, the outer state of bondage will persist. When that is done, the burden of slavery to the senses and the objective world will be diminished. Then, the code of behaviour toward the objective world will be merged with the code toward the inner Divinity, and the urges will all be cooperating harmoniously.

The *Vedānta*, the scriptures relating to the Supreme Spirit (*adi-Atmic sastras*), and *dharmā* —all invite one to live and act as God (Bhagavan) and not as bondsman. Then, all acts become virtuous acts (*dharmā-karmas*) and not acts done with intent to gain the fruits thereof (*kamya-karma*). The shackles of bondage cannot be avoided by a mere change of type of activity. They can be avoided only by changing the point of view from the created to the Creator (*deha* to the *Deva*). Thereby, the moral qualities will also be rendered stronger.

Egotism based on the body is hell

Some people hold the opinion that being employed is bondage, while sitting at home without any specific work is freedom! This is a sign of want of intelligence. When employed in a job, one has to obey the superior officer. But can one escape the demands and compulsions of relations even while at home? When amidst friends, can one avoid the necessity of acting according to their fancy? Can one be free at least from the need to take care of one's own body and cater to one's own comfort? How then can one feel free while in the cage of bondage? All life is a prison, whatever the difference between one type of sentence and another. It is so, as long as the attitude of identifying the Self with the body is there.

That is why Sankara once said that “egotism based on the body is what is meant by hell (*naraka*).” Egotism of this kind is just another form of the contra-divine attitude.

Who can remove all the thorns and pebbles from the face of the earth? The only way to avoid them is to move about with footwear. So too, with the philosophy of *Vedanta*, with the vision fixed on the reality (*sathya*), with full faith in the Brahman, which is your own essential nature, you can bypass the need to transform the external world to suit your ideal of happiness and attain the practice of truth (*sathya-dharma*). That one is already liberated who tramples down egotism and declares with conviction thus:

I am not the bondsman of this body, which is the repository of all types of servitude; the body is my bondsman. I am the master and the manipulator of everything, I am the embodiment of freedom.

All codes of duties must help in this process of destruction of the ego; they should not foster it and make it grow wild. That is the road to freedom. If a person, finding life with the son miserable, goes to the daughter and lives in her house, that is not winning freedom! That is only a way of feeding the ego. This search for sensual happiness cannot be elevated into *dharma*.

True dharma is the fundamental basis

After all, what is a home for? For the enjoyment of the bliss derived from the contemplation of the Lord, for getting the opportunity to meditate on the Lord undisturbed. All the rest can be ignored, but not these. The true *dharma* of the individual is to taste the bliss of merging with the Absolute and to attain true liberation. A person who has reached that stage can never be bound, even if put in the grimmest of prisons; on the other hand, for a person who is the slave of the body, even a blade of grass can become an instrument of death.

True *dharma* is to be immersed in *Atmic* bliss, the inner vision, the steady faith in the identity of one's real nature with the Absolute, and the realization that all is Brahman; these four are the authentic *dharma*. In this physical existence as particular individuals, these four are named truth, peace, love, and nonviolence (*sathya*, *santhi*, *prema*, and *ahimsa*) for the convenience of practice (but yet saturated with the inner *dharma* of *Atmic* reality), so that particular individuals who are also personifications of that Absolute can follow them in daily life. The mode of pursuit of *dharma*, now, as in the past, is to adhere to these high principles in every act and thought. The truth, peace, love, and nonviolence of today are but the unintermittent immersion in *Atma*, the vision fixed on the inner truth, the contemplation of one's real nature, and the knowledge that all is Brahman, the one and only. These, the fundamental and the derived, must be coordinated and harmonized. Then only can it be termed *Atma-dharma*.

It does not matter what your activity is or what name and form you have chosen. A chain is a chain whatever

the material; it binds whether it is iron or gold, doesn't it? So too, whether the work is of this type or that, as long as the *Atma-dharma* is the base and the Absolute Principle (*Atma-thathwa*) is the root, it is *dharma*, beyond doubt. Such work will bless one with the fruit of peace (*santhi*).

When the waves of egotist fear or greed drive one forward, into the privacy of the home, the loneliness of the forest, or any other refuge, it is impossible to escape suffering. The cobra does not cease to be a cobra when it lies coiled; then, too, it is cobra. In daily practice, when acts are motivated by the basic principle of the reality of the *Atma*, every act becomes stamped with the seal of *dharma*. But when acts are motivated by convenience and selfish interest, the *dharma* becomes pseudo-*dharma*. It is a variety of bondage, however attractive it may be. Like prisoners in a jail pushed in a single file by wardens, either to the court of trial or to the dining barracks, the prompting of the senses pushes the bondsman forward either to a place of sorrow or to a place of relief.

Why, even the feeling “that is a friend” or “this is an enemy” is an error. This delusion has to be given up. The Lord, the embodiment of love, is the only constant friend, relative, companion, guide, and protector. Know this and live in that knowledge. This is *dharma* built on the bedrock of understanding, this is life built on the bedrock of *dharma*. Ignoring this fundamental basis, when attention is concentrated on external polish, the goal moves beyond reach. Attachment to the world can be destroyed only by attachment to the Lord.

Why complain that the ground cannot be seen when all the while your gaze is fixed on the sky? Watch the ground and look at the sheet of water that reflects the sky —then you can see, at the same time, the sky above and the earth below. So too, to adhere to the law of truth (*sathya-dharma*) (which, after all, is the practice of the immanent *Atmic* principle) you must see in every act the reflection of the glory of the *Atma*; then, attachment to the Lord will transmute attachment to the world into a pure offering. The goal should not be altered or lowered; that is to say, the essentials should be kept intact. *Dharma* does not depend on the various names and forms that its application entails; they are not so basic; *dharma* depends more on the motives and the feelings that direct it and canalize it.