

VEDIC DHARM APTITUDE TEST 2**CURRICULUM**

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Introduction

Vedas and other related Vedic scriptures state that the purpose of being born as human beings is to enjoy our life in Sanskrit called bhoga and make effort towards attaining Eeshvar/God realization and bliss which in other words has been stated as achieving liberation of soul and in Sanskrit called Moksha or apvarg. However, Vedic scriptures also advise that we should enjoy life only while doing virtuous deeds which form the basis of dharma. The same goals in other in other words have been expanded and stated as that we should make four types of purushārths (efforts/deeds) in life called Dharma, Artha, Kāma and Moksha. Dharma means performing virtuous deeds, artha means acquiring both wealth and prosperity, kāma means fulfillment of worthy desires and enjoying life, and Moksha as stated earlier means liberation of soul and attainment of God realization and bliss.

V-DAT 2 ¶ will discuss these issues in considerable detail along with what are Arya Samaj's goals and who have been its most prominent leaders. Our hearty thanks to all the authors who have contributed to the preparation of various topics of V- DAT2. There is minor repetition of some aspects of the topics, but this has been retained to reinforce their discussion in a different context.

1 - Four objectives of Life

The four Purusharth (efforts): Dharm, Arth, Kaama & Moksh

What are the aims and objectives of human life?

The Vedic philosophy points to the broader concept of the main purpose of human life, namely the four Purusharth; a blueprint to skilfully engage in inner and outer work for a successful, satisfying, balanced existence in the world -at the deepest and most holistic level.

What are the 4 Purusharths about?

1. **Dharm:** Read as duty, faith, religion, sacred law, justice, ethics, morality, etc.
Dharm is best understood as righteous living. It consists of timeless universal values and promotes a duty-based culture (rights with responsibilities and accountability).
2. **Arth:** Righteous earnings, wealth, and prosperity.
Upholding austerity, simplicity and detachment, the Ved does not glorify poverty. The desire for wealth is not an impediment to self-realization, but greed and attachment to wealth are.
3. **Kaam:** Righteous enjoyment; satisfying needs, not greed.
Moderation unfolds compassion, transforms men into real humans, and fosters the judicious use of resources. Wild enjoyment, lust, greed and pride incite misuse of resources, delusion and one's downfall.
4. **Moksh:** Dharm, Arth and Kaama are the steps leading to salvation - liberation from the cycle of birth and death to be in the bliss of the All-blissful Eeshvar (God).
The Purusharths are interwoven, not stand-alone modules in human life. They promote social hygiene, drive people to be social beings. The reverse would lead to the deluded state: obsessions, inordinate desires, moral and social decadence.
They invigorate human life as truly meaningful on the path of material and spiritual fulfilment.

What are the concepts of Dharm?

The four means to know Dharm are:

1. *Shruti*, the teachings of the Ved;
2. *Smriti*, the teachings of sages through the ancillary Vedic texts;
3. *Sadaachar*, the upright behavior of noble people
4. *Swasyacha-priya-aatma*, the cherished experiences of the soul, the inner guidance, and truthful feelings which prompts us to right behavior such as 'first treat others as we would like to be treated'.

All the above lead to impartial decisions, to be truthful in thoughts, words and deeds, and reject what is not true, partiality, and unfitting/ immoral behavior.

...*Dharma jijnāsamānānām pramānam paramam shrutih* || (Manu2. 13)

Dharm is best known through the Vedas.

What are the elements of Dharm?

Sage Manu, the universal lawgiver, describes the 10 essential rules of virtuous conduct as:

1. Patience (*dhriti*);
2. Forgiveness / compassion / empathy (*kshamaa*);
3. Fortitude / self-control (*dama*);
4. Non-stealing (*asteya*);
5. External & internal cleanliness (*saucha*);
6. Control of senses (*indriya nigraha*);
7. Sense of reasoning (*dhee*);
8. Knowledge (*Vidyaa*);
9. Truth (*satya*); and
10. Non-anger or never to lose temper (*akrodha*).

In the Sanskaar Vidhi, Maharshi Dayanand Saraswati affirms that these ten precepts of Dharm stand to reinforce non-violence (*Ahimsaa*). In short, it implies an ongoing awareness of our thoughts, words, and actions.

Human instinct prompts each and every one to recognize whether his/her actions are correct or not, one need to give a pause to listen to the inner voice. Joy, lack of interest, cheerfulness augur positivity. In low spirits and sensing agitation, fear, shame, etc. one needs to review his plans.

Dharm, as righteous living, is vital for social hygiene and well-being at the personal, family, community, national and universal levels. The precepts, not only elevate the soul to attain *Moksh* (salvation) but first and foremost serve as a code of conduct to enjoy both the worldly pleasures and attain divine happiness.

Besides the Manusmriti, is there any other reference to Dharm as a universal code of conduct?

The Yog Darshan of Sage Patanjali has a similar set of universal values. *Yama* and *Niyama*, the first two steps in the 8-fold process of Yog, are the dos and don'ts pertaining to social and personal discipline.

Adopted as part and parcel of life, the living values of Yog empower us to realize happiness, peace and prosperity in the long run: the opportunity cost is foregoing fleeting pleasures. Prioritizing on goals and renunciation of inferior alternatives are part and parcel of life. (*Example: Working towards a better adult life involves relinquishing many of the immediate pleasures that one is often pushed to pursue in youthful life.*)

The five Yamas are: (1) *Ahimsaa*: non-violence; (2) *Satya*: truth; (3) *Asteya*: non-stealing; (4) *Brahmacharya*: the learning phase of life (including the study of the scriptures), coupled with control of the senses; and (5) *Aparigraha*: the non-accumulation of superfluous thoughts and things.

The five Niyamas are: (1) *Saucha*: internal & external cleanliness; (2) *Santosha*: be content with the fruits of one's actions after putting our utmost efforts; (3) *Tapah*: penance, resilience to adversity; (4) *Svādhyāya*: study of the scriptures, contemplation & introspection; (5) *Eeshvara pranidhāna* or submission to God & the laws of nature.

In the Yog Darshan, the treatise Yog philosophy, Sage Patanjali affirms that the Yama and Niyama stand to reinforce *Ahimsaa* (non-violence).

How do we apply 'Dharm' in day-to-day life?

The dynamics of the living values of '*Dharm*' or *Yama-Niyama* of the Yog philosophy operate at the two levels, namely:

Level 1

- 1.1 Thoughts (*Manasaa*);
- 1.2 Speech (*Vaachaa*); and
- 1.3 Deeds or bodily actions (*Karmanaa*).

Level 2

2. 1 Own commitments or self-doings (*krita*);
2. 2 Shared ideas/opinions and instructions/orders, to be or done by others (*Kaarita*); and
2. 3 Consent, expressed or silent, to be or done by others (*anumodita*).

Once learnt, we should have a consistent and committed desire to let these flow into our life and progress on the path to 'be human' (*manurbhava*)

Easier said, than done...How do we overcome the obstacles to righteous living?

The obstacles to righteous living, self-regulation or restraint and observances are: perverse, unwholesome, troublesome or deviant thoughts; Coupled with ignorance, ego, anger, greed, false beliefs, fear, coercion, etc. , these negative thoughts would dampen our energy levels, be they mild, moderate or intense in nature.

We need to repeatedly remind ourselves that these thoughts and actions are the causes of unending misery and ignorance. To overcome these hurdles, we should cultivate positive thoughts and contemplate on the benefits of righteous living.

SWOT is the key to surf the tides: Use our **S**trengths to resist and overcome the **W**eaknesses, extract **O**pportunities to light up the goodness when confronted with **T**hreats.

Is the maxim “the end justifies the means” in line with Dharm?

The answer is obviously no, because “The end justifies the means” promotes other sores, for example- the saying “an eye for an eye” entices mankind to subscribe to policies where the world would be turning blind and deaf.

“One reaps what he sows”. The spiritual law of causation or law of Karm states: “Every action has an equal and corresponding reaction”. If one does bad things, bad things will happen to him, and if he does good things, good things will happen to him.

Achieving the end by unfair means might generate some success and jubilation. As bad seeds cannot generate a good yield, the negative action (Karm) will yield its own negative consequence in medium and long term. At that point in time, one would have forgotten the actions and then grumble ...I have never done wrong, why the pains, and sorrows?

The present-day artificial lifestyle is a blurred one, marked by immoderation, fleeting pleasures, disregard of nature, etc. where greed is mixed-up with needs, unethical practices are smothering virtue, and the spiral plunge in negativities is taking its toll.

Every individual should be heroic, firm, resourceful and resolute in spirit, generous and sovereign - a custodian and preacher of Dharm. The dynamics of Dharm preserve society when malicious forces threaten to destroy it; on the other hand, the neglect of Dharm undermines human life. Dharm is as essential to human life as spine is to human body.

What is Arth? Dharm precedes Arth, why?

Arth is righteous earnings, wealth.

The Ved upholds a bountiful life coupled with austerity, simplicity and detachment. ...*vayam syaama patayo rayinaam* in the RigVed 10. 121. 10 is prayer seeking the grace of the Almighty Eeshvar/God for us to be masters of material and spiritual treasures. The Ved does not glorify poverty. The desire for wealth is not an impediment to spirituality. Greed and attachment to wealth are obstacles to material and spiritual prosperity.

Present-day world population is in a rat race pursuing wealth as the one-and-only goal of human life, the more one acquires the more he wants. The materialistic outlook has reduced man into a slave of money, and human society to only a market. Wild consumption has engendered several problems such as depletion of resources, global warming, pollution, etc. threatening life on our planet, Earth.

Righteous earnings are realised when Dharm precedes Artha:

- » Money and worldly goods are acquired through fair and untainted means to sustain living, to fulfil the physical needs of food, clothing and shelter, as well as to lead a prosperous and satisfying life.
- » Production of goods and services, businesses, jobs, etc. promote the physical, mental and social well-being.
- » There is no inequitable distribution of wealth across the production channels, or unlimited accumulation of wealth, or an immoderate, degenerate, and copycat lifestyle.
- » People work to fulfil needs not greed; Lust, greed, anger, hatred, hoarding of resources and wealth, black-marketing, exploitation of man by man, corrupt practices and the likes have no place in a truly humane society.

Honesty, truthfulness, nonviolence are the underlying principles to ethical or righteous earnings and dealings as well as a comprehensive economic system with a holistic approach to welfare, i.e. the sustainability of human life, other forms of life, the environment and nature matters.

What is Kaam?

Kaama is the righteous enjoyment of Artha (the righteous earnings & wealth) and the fulfilment of normal biological desires at a proper age, hence the Grihasth aashram (married life) which is a social order and time to beget children of the highest physical, mental and spiritual order.

The Ved upholds a bountiful life as well as self-discipline and self-restraint to preserve the vital life energies and forces, and to stay away from debility. The urge to satiate desires does not justify immoderation. Instead excesses inflame the fire. The long-term results are addictions, physical and mental weakness, and flaring social evils which burden human life.

The present-day market driven human society is stifling. The atmosphere is a hyper-vitiated one, a consequence of the forcible arousal of instincts by artificial means; production of various good and services, thereafter invasive advertising which gives birth to superfluous needs.

Self-control and self-restraint are side-tracked as unattainable dreams. It is more than often accepted that "the end justifies the means", thus the recourse to shortcuts and other devious means to satiate abnormal urges. Worse, the mind-set is that one who refuses to be drowned in the tide of immoderation is tagged as a social misfit.

It is easy to control the normal urges. The artificial and abnormal ones are simple to stimulate but difficult to control. Awareness, proper knowledge and prioritising ones needs rather than greed are crucial to sanitize the artificially bubbled environment.

One feels the tranquillity of body and mind after quenching normal urges. The lookout to satisfy abnormal desires upsets the peace of mind, constantly dominated by fear of the consequences. Those who suppress the inner voice only live to regret their deeds.

Righteous enjoyment within the scope of righteous living yields a prosperous and satisfying life. It promotes the physical, mental and social well-being of the individual, his relatives and friends, and saves all from social breakdown.

The trio of Dharm, arth and kaam constitute an awesome antidote to lust, greed, undue desires, hoarding, corrupt practices and the likes. They are vital to ensure the sustainability of human and other forms of life and the environment.

What is Moksh?

The four *purusharthas* (पुरुषार्थ), *Dharma* (धर्म), *arth* (अर्थ), *kaam* (काम) and *Moksh* (मोक्ष) provide structure and meaning to human life. They motivate us to live with a sense of duty, moral obligation and responsibility, as well as a balanced life for the fulfilment of normal human desires in their own place and legitimacy and abstain from inordinate cravings.

After tiresome efforts to pursue the everyday goals of life (*abhyudaya* अभ्युदय), to earn a living and to quench our desires, we all seek moments of inner peace, and retire from the rush, the insanity. The cycle of desires is a ferocious one, new desires sprout as soon as previous ones are fulfilled. Addiction and immoderation lead to physical collapse as the body cannot eternally give in to the fury. Worse, unfulfilled desires kick-off the subconscious mind; irritation and ignorance (*avidyaa* अविद्या) confounds the intellect; we lose sight of the self as a distinct entity from the body (matter) and get entangled as a slave to obsessions and cravings.

The Vedic philosophy upholds gradual renunciation through self-restraint, thus be spared from bondage. Renunciation is fuel to sustain the fire of true knowledge (*vidyaa* विद्या) in the mind of the seeker in his quest for the highest level of spiritual wellness (*nishreyasa* निश्रेयस). The intellect enlightened with discriminative knowledge (*viveka* विवेक) paves the way to total detachment from worldly desires (*vairagya* वैराग्य).

The human form of life is endowed with the highest level of consciousness. *Viveka* and *vairagya* motivate the seeker to realise the subtle self (soul) as a distinct entity within the gross or physical body. Self-realization is called *aatma saakshaatkar* (आत्म साक्षात्कार). The seeker's deeds are now selfless with no strings to any desire, *Nishkaam Karm* (निष्काम कर्म). His only desire is to attain the goal of self

realization: *Moksh* or emancipation from pains and sorrows, liberation from the cycles of birth and death.

As the wisdom flows into his thoughts, words and deeds the seeker progresses along the spiritual path, clearing the way to realise God, the super-consciousness - *Eeshvar saakshaatkar* (ईश्वर साक्षात्कार). The soul is now in its pure self and enjoys the bliss of the Universal Supreme Spirit.

In due time, the soul leaves the body like the ripe fragrant musk melon detaches itself from the vine (*urvaarukmiva bandhanaan-mrityormuksheeya mamritaata* RV 7. 59. 12). The soul is liberated from the cycles of birth and death, attains Moksh. It ultimately lives in the bliss of the Almighty Eeshvar, God for the entire period of Moksha period.

The Vedic path of life is a real empowerment process for human beings to realize the mundane as well as the spiritual goals of life: (i) *Dharm*, righteous living; (ii) *Artha*, righteous earnings; (iii) *Kaama*, righteous enjoyment from the *Artha*; and (iv) *Moksh*

Is Moksh attained through:

- Pilgrimage (*teertha* or visiting specific places) or
- By having special baths (*snaan*)?
- Do departed souls attain Moksh when relatives perform certain rituals?
- What happens to food offered to departed souls?

None Of the Above.

Pilgrimage to specific places may be inspiring to refrain from negative thoughts, speech and actions. It is not a bleaching agent or detergent to whitewash our Karmas.

We shall reap as we sow! This is the law of Karmphala (कर्मफल) and no one can escape that. He who embarks on a pilgrimage or do any ritual with the hope that negative Karm will be wiped out and God will automatically grant him *mukti/Moksh* is simply worsening his situation.

Such acts are attempts to bribe the *Nyaakaaree* (न्यायकारी) All-Just Eeshvar. Bribery is an offence in this world ...what about trying to fool God?

Baths serve only to purify the body, not the mind and hearts or the centers of mental and emotional activities (*antahkarana अंतःकरण*). Water has no consciousness. It cannot make the difference between sinful and virtuous actions. If ever it could wash any Karm, it would have washed out both the bad well as the good Karm.

Rituals may only inspire living relatives and friends to walk on the virtuous footprints of the departed only if time is spent to revisit the life of that person and learn from his life experiences. Nothing reaches that departed soul which has already entered a new body.

Offering food to departed souls never reaches them. The soul cannot perform any deed without organs, therefore it need be present in a physical body. If ever it could have come back, that soul should leave the body where it now dwells ...that implies death at some other place! Is that not killing or murder by remote control?

Donations to charities serving the needy and other noble causes are positive actions in memory of departed near and dear ones. These add to the balance of positive Karm of the doer. No such letter box or transfer system exists to reach departed souls.

The route to Moksh/mukti:

Udvayantamasaspari svah...jyotirutamam (YV 35. 14), *Yatra devaa' amritamaanashaanaastriteeye...*(YV 32. 10), and several other hymns from the Ved refer to acquiring true knowledge (*vidya*) and letting that knowledge flow into one's life as the one and only path to achieve Moksh. *Vidyaa* dispels the darkness of ignorance (*avidyaa*), the root cause of other afflictions and bondage.

The Yog philosophy or treatise on the realization of Moksh spells out the following:

- » True knowledge stimulates *vairagya*, i.e. non-attachment to worldly desires. Coupled with discernible wisdom (*viveka*), that *vairagya* in turn destroys the seeds or the root causes of bondage, and absolute liberation is attained. (YD 3. 50)
- » The purest aspect of the intellect (sattvic buddhi सात्त्विक बुद्धि) triggers the pure consciousness of the self, after which comes absolute liberation. (YD 3. 55)
- » True knowledge arms the intellect to know the soul and the mind as separate objects. (YD 4. 25)
- » Discerning knowledge (*viveka jnyaana*) directs the mind on the path to attain absolute liberation (Kaivalya, Moksh). (YD 4.26)

When the soul is detached from desires, the power of pure consciousness becomes established in its true nature (the immaculate bliss of Eeshvar/God). (YD 4. 34)

2 - Three obligations

Overview

This is an incident about a young girl who was on a family vacation. One morning, she woke up early feeling very energetic and in a good mood. Everyone was still asleep; it was very quiet and peaceful. She opened the window to let the fresh air in; a gust of cool air blew past her cheeks and with that she heard the ocean waves washing on the shore. She could not recall the last time she felt so good. She decided to go outside for a walk on the beach. When she stepped out, she saw the sun rising beyond the horizon and the wonderful shades of color that filled the sky. While she was walking on the beach, underneath her tender feet, she felt something hard. She lifted her feet to look and discovered a tiny shell that had washed up to the shore. She picked it up and started admiring the artistry. Her eyes gleamed and lips smiled. She pocketed the shell and continued to enjoy her walk.

On the first day of school after vacation, she went to see her mathematics teacher. She always admired her for being a good mentor. Before they departed she handed her a nicely wrapped box. The teacher accepted the gift and said, "Thank you."

That evening she got a call from her teacher expressing joy and gratitude for a very thoughtful gift. The teacher added, "This tiny colorful shell was unique to her shell collection."

Incident Analysis

Reading the incident above, it is clear the teacher was thankful to the student, not only once but twice. The difference was, the first time it was a mere reaction. While the second time around, it was truly from her heart for a thoughtful gift from her student. It is human behavior to thank someone for any goodness they receive. In this case, the girl was the recipient of this gesture of gratitude. Now how about the girl: should she be thankful as well? After all she did not buy the gift, nor did she make it. But rather she borrowed it. Hence, she should also express gratitude, but to whom and for what? Here are few things she can be thankful for:

1. To her parents who brought her on vacation
2. To those who help her cultivate a thoughtful mind
3. To nature, for motivating her to step out of bed and take a walk
4. To the one who woke her up in a good mood, to the one who painted the sky with colors that pleased her eyes, to the one who has intelligence to make the very shell she gifted to her beloved teacher.

Attitude of Gratitude

Human beings naturally feel obligated to show gratitude towards someone or something that helps them. And hence, from a young age we are taught to be grateful to people who help us or are kind to us. This attitude of gratitude has to extend beyond the boundaries of a physical aspect. In our lifetime we receive so many unexplainable, wonderful things. Just because we do not know or cannot see the giver of those moments, it does not mean we are not obligated to them.

Vedic Philosophy

The objective of human life is to liberate ourselves from pains and sorrows, which results from ignorance. Manu Smriti details social and moral conduct of a person and teaches us how to live a Dharmic (virtuous) life. Fulfilling our obligations is also a part of becoming virtuous. The following verse from sixth chapter of Manu Smriti states:

ऋणानि त्रीण्यपाकृत्य मनो मोक्षे निवेशयेत् ।

अनपाकृत्य मोक्षं तु सेवमानो व्रजत्यधः ॥ ३५ ॥

Riṇāni trīṇyapākṛtya mano mokṣe niveśayet ।

Anapākṛtya mokṣaṃ tu sevamāno vrajatyadhaḥ ॥ 35 ॥

One shall turn his mind towards liberation only after having paid off the three debts; without having paid them, if he seeks for liberation, he sinks downwards. —(35)

In other words, unless you fulfill all obligations, they will remain an obstacle during prayer and meditation.

As per Vedic philosophy fulfilling one's obligations is one of the primary duty of a human being. Until we meet them, we cannot free ourselves from the bondage. These obligations are many in number and variety. Hence, our Rishis simplified them by dividing them into three basic categories:

1. Dev Rin
2. Pitri Rin
3. Rishi Rin

These obligations are only mandated for humans, since only humans are endowed with the power of free will. Meaning only humans can willfully fulfill them.

Dev Rin

Dev Rin is our obligations towards devtaas. That raises a question who truly is a "devtaa"? As per Vedic scriptures devtaa is someone or something that possess the following three qualities:

- One who possesses divine qualities, which are worthy of acquiring
- One who has capability to inspire others to embrace those divine qualities
- One who gives unconditionally, without discrimination and generously

Eshvar is Mahadeva, the deva of all devas, i.e. the greatest amongst all. We are obligated to Him, because by the virtue of Him being Omnipotent and Omniscient, He creates this manifested universe in every cycle so that souls (jivaatmaas) can liberate themselves from the bondage caused by ignorance. He

not only creates the universe, but also protects, maintains and sustains the creation. He is the creator of innumerable objects, minute to huge; to which He provides motion and stability. He is the giver of life and provider of vital energy (praana) that enlivens us. He grants us the mind, senses and body by the virtue of which we fulfill our desires and experience pleasure or pain. Because He is subtlest among the subtle, He pervades everything. He is unconditionally merciful and kind to us. Eeshvar creates, sustains and brings about the dissolution of the universe. He is the one who reveals the knowledge of Vedas, which enables us to understand His intelligence (laws of nature) and all the objects created by Him. Eeshvar constantly inspires us. He is the inner voice that guides our conscience. Eeshvar is constantly and continuously helping, protecting, nurturing and providing us, and hence we are obligated to Him. He is our mother, father, guru, acharya, best friend, leader, mentor and director. It is our primary duty to fulfill dev rin by living a Dharmic – virtuous life and becoming ideal noble beings. Eeshvar’s rin can be fulfilled by developing unconditional love and faith towards Him. We should pray and meditate upon Him and only Him. Our prayer should express gratitude towards Him. We should be constantly aware of His presence within us and we should listen and follow His directions to live a righteous life with firm resolve.

Eeshvar is Chetan (conscious) devtaa, while other devtaas are jada (inert) or non-living. These jada devtaas are also created by Eeshvar. Their intrinsic nature is to give and give unconditionally without discrimination. These natural resources are an invaluable gift to us from Eeshvar. These include the sun, moon, earth, fire, air, water and many more. For example: the sun’s intrinsic nature is to provide heat and light. It does so to all living beings on the Earth unconditionally and indiscriminately. Not only that, it never fails in doing so. And hence the Sun is considered a devtaa. All other natural resources that are made available to us by God are devtaas. It is our moral obligation to keep this environment clean and free from pollution; failing to do so will result into suffering or will threaten our existence. It is our duty not to misuse, abuse or waste these natural resources. On the other hand, we should preserve and protect them, so all living beings can enjoy them for a long time. Jada devtaas are not God and one should not worship them as God. Instead one should protect and preserve them and draw inspiration from them. Our Rishis have prescribed daily “Yajna” to preserve and protect the environment.

Pitri Rin

Pitri rin is the obligation towards human beings who impact our life, right from the time we are born till death. Our parents give us birth and from that day on they care, nurture and protect us. Their love for us is unconditional. And hence we have an obligation to our parents; however, it is not limited to our parents. There are several other family members such as grandparents, siblings, uncles and aunts who contribute and impact our upbringing. Thereafter it includes our friends, neighbors, community and society. There are numerous people, such as policeman, fireman, soldiers, teachers, caretakers, social workers, doctors etc. , who play an important role in our life. Pitri rin is the obligation towards everyone who is responsible for our physical, emotional (mental), intellectual and moral growth.

We can meet these obligations by:

- Honest respectful behavior towards them
- Serving and honoring (seva) without expectations
- Helping those in need

- Showing sincere gratitude
- Participating in community services and public works
- Working together for the progress of the society and country
- Raising a family with Vedic values
- Building a moral and ethical society
- Listening and following advice of elders and wise ones.

Rishi Rin

Rishi rin is an obligation towards one who has specifically contributed towards our intellectual and spiritual growth. First and foremost, education begins at home by our parents and grandparents. However, there are many others who help us become a better person, students and successful professionals. Hence, we are not only indebted to our parents, but also to our teachers and professors. Beside professional educators, there are other teachers such as pandits, vidvans, acharyas, swamis or gurus, who play an important role in our spiritual growth. We are equally obligated to them. Today we are fortunate to have access to Vedic knowledge by the virtue of our Rishis, we are indebted to them as well. And last but not least, we are indebted to the greatest Guru amongst all the Paramguru Parampita Paramaatma (Eeshvar-God), who is constantly enlightening and inspiring our intellect to guide us on the righteous path.

We can pay our debts to our gurus by:

- Being an obedient student.
- Thanking them and assisting them in further promoting the knowledge.
- Giving them guru dakshina and donating for the virtuous cause.
- Being generous, respectful and considerate.
- Living a life as guided by them.
- Imparting knowledge we have acquired from our teachers to the younger generation and paying our share in the growth and development of our heritage and cultural traditions.

Misconceptions about Rins

- Obligations are only towards the non-living or the dead.
- Participating in mere worships and rituals are enough to meet all our obligations.
- Pitri rin is the act that is performed with all sincerity and faith (Śrāddh) to pay homage to one's dead parents.
- Dev rin can be repaid by performing various religious acts and worships (Poojaa) of deities.
- Pitri rin is an obligation to fulfill unfulfilled wishes of ancestors who have passed away.
- Performance of Pind Daan, Śrāddh and Tarpan (libations of water) relieves the hunger and thirst of the departed soul during its journey to the Pitri Lok.
- Adopt a guru and blindly follow his advice.

Rins and Other Associated Vedic Concepts

It may seem very grim and depressing when we realize we are indebted to everyone and everything around us. However, the same Rishi's who gave us guidelines to understand the different types of obligations have also given us the means to fulfill those obligations. According to the Vedas, to pay back all debts one needs to make appropriate effort (purusha artha) to perform five daily duties (panch mahayajnya) as per the stage of his/her life (ashram) and social class (varna Dharma).

Thus, the notion of the three rinas and five yajnas is integrally woven into the scheme of four-fold Purusharthas, four stages of life and four social classifications. By living a virtuous lifestyle as prescribed by the Vedas, one can overcome the challenge of paying the daunting debts (rin) to the Devas, Pitars and Rishis.

Yajnyopaveet Ceremony and Significance

Yajnyopaveet Ceremony is usually described as an initiation ceremony where a child or young adult begins his/her spiritual learning with a teacher and starts to wear a thin consecrated cord. The cord is composed of three cotton strands which symbolize three debts that one must never forget. The first debt is to one's teachers (guru or deva rin); those who have taught and given knowledge and virtuous values to the wearer. The second debt is to one's parents and family (pitri rin); those who have nurtured the wearer at home. The third debt is to sages and scholars (rishi rin); those who have given us scriptures, knowledge and wisdom over the ages, which now enlighten and enrich everybody's life in the society. The Yajnyopaveet is also called Janeu and by other names in various regions of India. While this understanding is important, the significance of Yajnyopaveet is much deeper. A person who wears Yajnyopaveet makes a commitment to do Yajnya in life to fulfill all his/her obligations. Yajna is performing virtuous Karmas at all three levels: thoughts, words and deeds; as well as, helping others achieve the same goal. The Yajnyopaveet is sacred because it reminds us that we must perform yajnya in life at all times, otherwise it is just a cord containing three cotton strands. The Yajnyopaveet is worn on the left shoulder and directed towards the right side of the waist. Along the way, as Yajnyopaveet crosses the chest it passes in front of the heart, symbolically indicating that the resolutions that accompany this thread are taken seriously with a caring, loving and kind heart and a resolute mind for success.

Summary

One cannot achieve the ultimate goal in life (liberation from suffering) without fulfilling all three obligations in life.

Dev rin is our debt towards powers which control nature and its various phenomena, and which have endowed us with invaluable gifts of air, water, fire, food, vegetation etc. Human beings get easy access to the objects created by God.

Pitri Rin is our debt to our parents, family, relatives and society as a whole for giving us birth and providing conditions for our survival and development by maintaining the institution of family and cohesive social structure in the society.

Rishi rin is our indebtedness towards our teachers, great seers, sages, discoverers and inventors who have brought our civilization and culture to this stage and have imparted knowledge and wisdom to humanity. Human beings acquire the knowledge propagated by the ancient sages and intellectuals. Thus, humanity is indebted to them.

One must not forget his/her greatest obligation of all obligations is towards Eeshvar, since He is the Dev, He is your Pita, and Greatest Rishi. One can repay all his/her debts in life by living a Vedic lifestyle.

3 - Four Ashrams (Stages of life)

According to Hinduism, human life that lasts about 100 years can be equally divided into four subdivisions of 25 years each, called ashramas

1. Brahmacharya Ashram (up to the age of 25)
2. Grishastha Ashram (up to the age of 50) (25 to 50 years of age)
3. Vanprastha Ashram (up to the age of 75) (50 to 75 years of age)
4. Sannyas Ashram (up to the age of 100) (75 to 100 years of age)

Brahmacharya (Student Life)

Brahmacharya is the first of four ashramas (age-based stages) of a human life, with Grihasth (householder), Vaanaprasth (retirement/forest dweller), and Sannyas (renunciation) being the other three ashrams. The Brahmacharya (bachelor student) stage of life – from childhood up to twenty-five years of age – was focused on education and included the practice of celibacy.

Upon the child's Upanayana sanskaar the young person would begin a life of study in the Gurukula (the household of the Guru) dedicated to learning all aspects of Dharm that is the "principles of righteous living". Dharm comprised personal responsibilities towards himself, family, society, humanity and God which included the environment, earth and nature. This educational period started when the child was five to eight years old and lasted until the age of 14 to 20 years. During this stage of life, the traditional vedic sciences and various shaastras were studied along with the religious texts contained within the Vedas and Upanishads. This stage of life was characterized by the practice of celibacy.

The graduation from Brahmacharya stage of life was marked by the SamavarTanm ceremony. The graduate was then ready to either start Grihasth (householder) stage of life, or wait, or pursue a life of Sannyas and solitude like Rishis in the forest.

Grihasth (Household Life)

The Sanskrit word Grihasth (गृहस्थ) is a composite "Grih-astha" of two root words Grih (गृह) and Astha (अस्थ). Grih means "home, family, house", while Asth means "devoted to, occupied with, being in". Grihasth means that which "being in and occupied with home, family" or simply "householder".

A man or woman entered the Grihasth stage after a Hindu wedding. They would build a home, raise a family, earn wealth, enjoy worldly life and participate in the society through virtues such as charity.

Grihasth is the second stage (25-50 years) of individual's life, in a 4 staged (age based) structure of Hindu ashram system. It follows the Brahmacharya ashram and is followed by Vaanprasth and Sannyas Ashrams respectively.

Listed below are some of the responsibilities of people in Grihasth ashram

- To make money and to enjoy sensual pleasure according to ethical principles.
- To perform Yajnya (Panchmahayajnya) and observe religious rituals.
- To protect and nourish family members (wife, children, and elders).
- To teach children spiritual values.
- To give in charity, and especially to feed holy people, the poor, and animals.

Vaanprasth (Retired Life)

Vaanprasth is a composite word with the roots “vana” meaning “forest, distant land” and prastha meaning “going to, abiding in, journey to”. The composite word literally means “retiring to forest”

Vaanprasth is the third stage of life (50-75), when a householder who has completed his Brahmcharya (studentship), and who faithfully discharged the duties of family life retires from worldly affairs and live in a forest or away from township. When a person enters this stage, he hands over household responsibilities to the next generation, takes an advisory role, if possible teach in a Gurukul and gradually withdraws from the superficial attractions of world. This stage typically follows Grihasth, but man or woman may choose to skip householder stage and enter Vaanprasth directly after Brahmcharya stage, as a prelude to Sannyas and spiritual pursuits.

Some Vedic scriptures state that when the male householder sees his hair turn grey, his skin gets loose and wrinkled, and he has grandkids, he should take retirement. One should abandon the use of all delicious foods, showy cloths and the most pleasant luxuries of town life and committing the care of his wife (if she does not want to join him in Vaanprasth) to his sons or taking her with himself, he should live in a lonely place in the country.

Vaanprasth is gradual transition of social responsibility, economic roles, personal focus towards spirituality, from being center of the action to a more advisory peripheral role, without actually requiring someone to actually moving into a forest with or without one's partner. While some literally gave up their property and possessions to move into distant lands, most stayed with their families and communities but assumed a transitioning role and gracefully accepted an evolving role with age. For example serving as a counselor, peace-maker, judge, teacher to young and advisor to the middle-aged.

Hindu traditions respected freedom and personal choice. While Grihasth and Vaanprasth stages of life were recommended, they were not a requirement. Any Brahmacharya may, if he or she wants, skip householder and retirement stage, go straight to Sannyas stage of life, thereby renouncing worldly and materialistic pursuits and dedicating their lives to spiritual pursuits.

Sannyas (Renounced Life)

According to Manusmriti, having lived in retirement (Vaanprasth) during the third portion of life, that is the 50th to 75th year, one should renounce all attachment to the worldly objects in the fourth stage, and

become a monk, or Sannyasee and remain a Sannyasee until death. One should try to discharge one's duties of every ashram knowing duties thereof and then must enter Sannyas, but if anybody else is interested to take Sannyas being ascetic by true speech etc. , then he can take Sannyas even at an early age.

Renunciation should be adopted from Grihasth (Household) or Vaanprasth (retirement) on the day when its ardent desire rises in the mind. When one feels free from all worldly desires and affections, even a brahmchaari can enter into Sannyas ashram.

So, there are three ways of becoming a Sannyasee. The first is the consecutive order that has been described above (Brahmacharya, Grihasth, Vaanprasth and Sannyas). The second is that of becoming a Sannyasi from Grihasth. The third is that of entering Sannyas directly from Brahmcharya and should be resorted to only by young persons who are committed to perfect knowledge and have their senses under thorough control and free from all worldly desires. Swami Dayanad Saraswati, the founder of Arya Samaj directly entered into Sannyas from Brahmcharya stage.

Traditionally Sannyas is allowed only to men who exhibit the qualities of a brahmana. According the Kathopnishad (2/23), one who is not free from evil deeds, who is not calm, whose mind is not concentrated and is not contented cannot realize God despite renunciation.

Sannyas (the 4th stage of life) is meant to disseminate knowledge of the Ved and the shaastras practice virtue and renounce vice, preach the gospel of truth and dispel doubts and ignorance of the people. But all those who do not discharge the most important duties of Sannyas, such as the preaching of truth and righteousness, are frauds and worthy of being rejected by the society at large. Therefore, it behoves Sannyasis to devote themselves assiduously to the preaching of truth and enlightening the minds of the people who are in doubt, to the studies of the Vedas and the Shastras and the propagation of the Vedic Dharm, thereby promoting the good (physical, social, mental and spiritual) of the whole world.

A Sannyasee is indifferent to pain and pleasure, abstains from meat and intoxicants, seeks only spiritual happiness, and go about preaching the gospel of truth and enlightening the world with the light of knowledge. Whenever anybody is angry with him in preaching or conversation or talks spitefully of him, or slanders him, he should not be angry with the person; but, on the contrary, he should always speak what is good for the person.

What is the necessity of adopting Sannyas?

As the head is necessary for the body, so is Sannyas for other Orders, since without it there can be no advancement in knowledge and righteousness. Persons belonging to other Orders, being engaged in house-hold work and in devotional practices cannot have much leisure. Besides it is very difficult for people belonging to other Orders to be altogether impartial in their dealing, nor can they equal a

Sanyasi, he being free from all worldly ties, in doing public good. Men of other Orders cannot get so much time as a Sanyasi who possesses a true knowledge of all things to elevate the people by enlightening them on all subjects. But the amount of good that those who enter into Sannyas directly from Brahmacharya can do by the teaching and preaching of truth can never be done by those who enter into it from Grihasth or Vaanaprasth.

4 - Varna Vyavastha - Classification of Society

Not only does Vedic Dharma attach importance to God, soul, spiritual knowledge, ceremonies, prayer, and other religious duties but it also provides guidance on the actions of individuals and societies. Vedic dharma pays particular attention to the development of an individual in the society. The concept of Dharm embraces both the individual and the society. A well-organized society and the well-disciplined and righteous life of an individual contribute towards progress. The development of the above two characteristics will also lead to God-Realization. Thus, these two aspects are also considered as important parts of Dharm.

For the development of society collectively, a system, known as Varna Vyavastha (class system - division of labour), was devised. While, for individual's development, Ashram Vyavastha (the system of Ashrams-stages of life) has been advocated.

Four Classes (groups) of Society

When we consider the population of any country we generally find that we can categorize people into four groups based on their abilities and natural tendencies. Some are more inclined and able towards learning, gaining knowledge, teaching, intellectual pursuits and of a peaceful disposition. Another group will be with administrative abilities and have energetic nature. Many will be found to display an aptitude for agriculture, commerce, trade, finance, business, etc. : Still another group might comprise persons who will be interested in manual work.

The System of Varna Vyavastha (Class System) has been formulated in Hinduism based on the above-mentioned four categories. The four classes have been determined only by the qualities, natural tendencies and actions of persons. To fully utilize the individual characteristic of each type of personality the people were placed into separate groups, which in turn were suggested a relevant occupation to each suited to the temperament and preparation. The system of classification was known as Varna Vyavastha or Class System. The Sanskrit word "Varna" means to select, or to take a liking to (Vriyn – to choose).

In this structure of division in society the intellectual ones were given the name BRAHMAN (Brahmin); the energetic group with administrative and fighting abilities was named KSHATRIYA; people who produced food and had commerce abilities were named VAISHYA; lastly those who took to manual labor were given the name Shoodra. These four groups or varnas are natural groupings to be found in any society, though known by different names.

Concept of Human Society as an Individual in the Vedas

The four Varnas or Classes are four component parts of human society. They work in conjunction with each other and each one complements the other. These four divisions are necessary in society. By their interdependence and co-operation with one another the human society evolves and becomes more

perfect. Amongst them, no class is considered superior or inferior; the thought of one challenging or hating the other does not arise.

The Vedas compare the human society with a person. A question is posed in mantra 31.13 of the YajurVed, "What is the face of this person, what are his arms, what is his stomach and thighs and what are his feet?" The succeeding mantra replies, "Braahman is face of this person, the arms are Kshatriya, the stomach and thighs are Vaishya, and the feet are Shoodra".

Two factors are outstanding in the above analogy: Firstly, the whole body is one and all its parts are interlinked and important. Each part has a duty to perform and help to nourish other parts. Together they complete the functioning of the body. Thus, the health and strength of the body is maintained and its development continues. All the organs have equal status and none is superior or inferior. Secondly, every organ has its own specific function to perform. The good health of the whole body depends on the proper functioning of each of the organs. The organs do not work for their own benefit but for the whole body. The above-mentioned description may be very aptly used to describe the relationship between the four classes that make up the society.

Duties of the four Varnas (classes)

1. Braahman (Brahmin) – A Braahman is a studious and intellectually strong person of peaceful disposition. He is considered to be the "head" of the "personified" society. A Braahman's duties are defined in the Manusmriti thus: (1-88) "To learn and to teach, to perform religious ceremonies and to exhort others to do so (work of a priest), to accept alms and to give alms, to renounce the surplus in excess of the individual's needs, are duties of a Braahman." The Gita (18-42) says, serenity, self-restraint, austerity, purity, forgiveness, humility, wisdom and belief in God, are the qualities of a Braahman.
2. Kshatriya – A Kshatriya is brave, bold, powerful and of a forceful nature. He is the "arms" of the "personified" society. In the Manusmriti his duties are outlined thus: (1-89) "To protect society, to govern or rule a country, to live a disciplined life, to give alms, to acquire knowledge, to live a life of devotion." Gita (18-43) says, "Bravery, splendor, patience, dexterity, to face challenge in war, give alms, live a life of devotion," are the natural qualities of a Kshatriya."
3. Vaishya – Conversant in monetary affairs, one who amass wealth, having a strong tendency towards business are the qualities of a Vaishya. He is the "stomach" of the "personified" society. Manusmriti (1-90) outlines the following tendencies of a Vaishya: "To engage in business, trade commerce, agriculture; to rear livestock; to engage in industrial work; to acquire knowledge; to give donations and to live a life of devotion." The Gita outlines similar qualities.
4. Shoodra – A Shoodra has no tendency towards intellectual work but is able to perform manual labor. The Gita and the Manusmriti point out that the Shoodra renders service to society by his manual labor. He is said to be the "feet" of the "personified" society. Unlike some condemnable practices in India over the past two thousand years, there must not be any disdain for a shoodra, because he/she is also an integral part of the society; one does not cut off his/her feet because we must remember they help us walk.

The Gita (4-13) says that the division of the classes is determined by the qualities, actions and natural tendencies of the individuals. The four Varnas perform their specific duties and at the same time work in conjunction with each other. This results in the maximum development and progress of human society as everyone is placed in the occupation for which he/she is best suited. This eliminates the possible wastage in the choice of wrong careers, and maximize productivity.

Creation of a Healthy Society

This Varna Vyavastha (Class System) greatly assists in creating a healthy society. The four varnas are component parts of a society and promote its welfare jointly and severally. When there is jealousy and hatred among the varnas, there will be unrest and agitation. Now days, there is much unrest and friction in society. The cause of this unrest is the excessive attachment to power and wealth. Everyone is engaged in accumulating as much wealth as possible, and in retaining power and control in one's own hands.

The class system did not attach much importance to wealth and power. The Braahman was respected by others for his intellect, wisdom and character, as he had no aim to accumulate wealth or power. The doctors, judges, lawyers, professors, teachers, scientists and priests of today belong to the Braahman class, but their fees are so high that the ordinary person cannot take advantage of their services as they cannot afford it. Under the class system, Braahmans of the above-mentioned qualifications considered it to be their duty to serve the community with no motive of pecuniary gain for themselves.

The community can prosper when service is not motivated by power and wealth.

People of all the four Varnas should have easy access to the necessities of life, i.e. no one should suffer from the lack of food and clothes and all should be sheltered in simple and hygienic houses. Medical services, entertainment etc. , should be made easily available to all. All students should receive free education and all individuals should have all the facilities for progress. It is in this way only that a healthy community can be structured.

Caste System

The Caste System has been a significant matter in and concern to the Hindu Society, but this system is not a part of Hindu religion, it bears no connection with class or Varna. This system has divided the Hindus into hundreds of community groups (castes). One caste has many sub-divisions; a person's caste is based on his birth. An individual is considered to be superior or inferior according to the caste in which he has been born. i.e. his qualities, character, education etc. , are simply ignored.

There are many factors that have given rise to the different castes, but the principal reason is occupation or trade e. g. goldsmith, tailor, builder, barber, shoemaker, potter, launderer etc. Persons of one common occupation formed a group of their own similar to the trade unions of today. For financial reasons these people taught their trade or occupation to their offspring only and later marriage between two persons

of the same group or occupation became common. Thus, the caste system took a firm hold based on birth. In the modern age, although there are many different trade unions that have adopted different rules and regulations their membership is not by birth.

Many castes came about by people of one clan uniting. Those born in one clan or dynasty formed a group with pride in their own achievements and characteristics and thus the feeling of superior and inferior castes crept in and became deep rooted.

Many foreign races entered India. They mingled with the Hindus and gave rise to some castes.

Living in a particular village or town had an effect in creating sub-castes also: e. g. a Braahman of Kanauj called himself a Kanauji-Braahman and the goldsmith (sunaar) of Paatan called himself a Paataneer Sunaar.

Today, however, because of the extensive and successful efforts of many reformers and social and religious groups (see Chapters 17 and 18) the feeling of equality prevails and it is now an accepted principle to grant all people equal opportunity for progress, hence, the caste system among the Hindus is fading out.

5 - Dharm Shastras - Hindu Scriptures

Kinds of Religious Books

The Shastras are referred to as religious books of the highest category. The Shastras can be divided into three groups:

1. Ved
2. Religious books in Sanskrit
3. Religious books written in other languages

1. VED: Ved is knowledge revealed by the Almighty to Rishis of pure, sinless and untainted minds at the beginning of creation. The Ved is the one-and-only authentic revelation, because they contain true knowledge imparted by God. The Vedas do not even need any proof to verify their authenticity. Knowledge contained in other religious books has to be amply proven for their authenticity.

2. RELIGIOUS BOOKS IN SANSKRIT: Learned scholars and saints have written elucidations on the Vedas in Sanskrit. Well known among these works are the Upanishads, Smritis, Braahmanas, Sutras, Gita and the six Darshanas.

3. RELIGIOUS BOOKS IN OTHER LANGUAGES: When Sanskrit ceased to be a spoken language among the general population, help of other language such as Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Gujarati, Bengali, was sought to explain the tenets of religion. Tulsi Das Ramaayan, Kambanna Ramaayan, Tirukkural, Satyaarth Prakash and other religious books were written. It is our duty to study our scriptures. It purifies our intellect, encourages us to follow the path of religion, and enlightens us about our duties and actions.

Our Main Scriptures

A brief description of our important scriptures is given below:

Ved

The Ved is the most important scripture of mankind and stands out of the crowd as the primordial root of all knowledge. It is the root of Hindu Religion. Hinduism has developed from the teachings contained therein. The meaning of the word Ved is knowledge. The Ved was revealed as four Samhitas (tomes/sections) at the dawn of creation to four Rishis:

- ❖ RIG Ved to AGNI RISHI
- ❖ YAJUR Ved to VAYU RISHI
- ❖ SAMA Ved to ADITYA RISHI
- ❖ ATHARVA Ved to ANGIRA RISHI

Each Ved is divided into chapters, mandal or adhyaya, and further divided into suktas (cantos). Each sukta deals with a particular subject. Some suktas have as little as four Mantras while others go up to

seventy and beyond. The verses of the Vedas are called Mantras. A Mantra has a two-fold effect. It imparts true knowledge and secondly it offers hope and security to a devotee who puts into practice the advice of the Mantra.

The language of the Vedas is old Sanskrit. It is different from the colloquial and literary Sanskrit in vogue today. We can call this Vedic Sanskrit or Chhandas language.

The Vedas are the source of all knowledge. Being of divine origin, they contain the seed of all branches of learning. "The Vedas are the books of all true knowledge. It is the paramount duty of all Aryas (Hindus) to read them, to teach them, to hear them and to preach them," (the third principle of Arya Samaj).

Braahmanas and Aaranyakas

The Braahmanas and the Aaranyakas are ancient treatises that explain the message of the Vedas and are substantially devoted to the significance and proper conduct of Vedic prayer, including its use in rites and ceremonies. They emphasize that the full benefit of the prayer may only be obtained when it is performed with a full knowledge of its meaning. They further explain that the incorporation of the meaning of a prayer into one's daily life is more important than the other details of religious practice. Many Hindus, like practitioners of other religions worldwide, are often more concerned with correctly performing the ritual than weaving the message into the fabric of their life.

Upanishads (Books of Vedaant)

Rishis have given discourses to explain the divine knowledge of the Vedas. These have been compiled to form the Upanishads. The word Upanishad means, "to sit near". Devotees sat near the Rishis to listen to discourses hence these texts are called Upanishads. We can also say that by attaining divine knowledge a devotee sits nearer to God by meditation. The Upanishads are many in number, but eleven are considered most important. They are Ish, Ken, Kath, Prashna, Mundak, Mandukya, Aitareya, Taittiriya, Chhandogya, Brihadaranyak, and Shvetashvatar.

Vedaant: The knowledge contained in the Upanishads is also referred to as Vedaant. The first Upanishad "Ish" is the last chapter of the YajurVed. Since this is at the end ("anta") of the Ved it is called Vedaant. There is also another meaning to it. The Ved contain many kinds of knowledge for the benefit of man in all spheres of his life but the ultimate goal of the knowledge of the Ved is God Realization. This knowledge is also called Vedaant.

Manusmriti: Shruti and Smriti

The ancient scriptures of the Hindus have been divided into 2 groups – "Shruti" and "Smriti".

The Ved has been called Shruti, because during meditation the Rishis "heard" the knowledge imparted to them by God. Shruti means knowledge that has been heard. Ved is called Shruti because disciples obtained this knowledge from their Gurus by listening. The disciples in turn perpetuated the oral transmission of the knowledge to subsequent generations.

Smriti means knowledge that has been memorized and passed on. The knowledge of the Vedas (Shruti) is perceived by the "Inner-self". A commentary on such perceived knowledge is called Smriti.

The Manusmriti is famous amongst such scriptures (Smritis) and its author is Manu. Manusmriti plays a major role in the structure of the Hindu Society. Rules for religious, political and social conduct are contained in the Smritis. The Manusmriti outlines regulations governing the structure or organization of a society; the administration of a country; sources of revenue; and methods of conducting trade, business etc. It also has laws for the punishment of criminals. The four stages of life (Ashrams) and the class system (Varna Vyavastha) are also elaborated in detail in the Manusmriti. Learned Vedic scholars believe that many shlokas of Manusmriti which are against the teachings of the Vedas are later addons and should be rejected.

Itihas (History)

Ramayan

The Ramayan is the first great composition of Sanskrit literature, written by Sage Valmiki. It portrays a picture of Hindu Society in the Vedic and Upanishadic ages. Religious principles of the Vedas and Upanishads were not just found in theory but practiced in real life. Together with the above the Ramayan contains historical details about those times, as well as spiritual/religious teachings that guided man to live an ideal life. The Ramayan depicts life led by the Aryas of Northern India, the chief characters being Ram and Sita. It also describes the colorful living conditions and customs of the people of Kishkandha (South-West India) known as Vanars and of the inhabitants in South India and in Lanka, latter known as Rakshasas. Their main characters were Sugreev, Hanuman, Ravan and Vibhishan. The social, political, religious and economic lives of the above communities are vividly described in the Ramayan.

The story of the Ramayan has been translated into every Indian language. The Tulsi Das Ramaayan in Hindi and Kambanna Ramaayan in Tamil being the most popular.

Mahabharat

The Mahaabhaarat is also a great epic written by Vyasa Rishi and it occupies an importance that equals Ramayan in Indian literature. The Mahabharat is not just a composition of historical events but it is also a book of religious importance. In the Ramayan the characters portray ideal persons while those of the Mahabharat behave as normal human beings. The Mahabharat depicts how people resort to injustice and oppressive means because of their greed, pride, selfishness and hypocrisy. Alongside it shows how the virtuous have undergone troubles and sufferings and still uphold the path the truth and justice.

The Mahaabhaarat is the story of the Pandavas and Kauravas who were cousins. The interesting story of Lord Krishna and his lofty teachings as contained in the Bhagavad Gita are also part of the Mahabharat. Besides Lord Krishna, other noble characters such as Bhishma, Yudhishtira, Arjuna, Vyasa, Vidur, Draupadi, Kunti and others are also found in the book.

A detailed and interesting description of the battle of the Mahaabhaarat, which was the greatest battle fought in ancient India takes up a large part of the book. The writer Vyasa Rishi's objective was to show that ultimately war and violence are harmful and meaningless to mankind.

Bhagavad Gita

The Gita is a part of the great epic, Mahabharat. Its significance is so great that it stands out as an independent scripture in itself. Commentaries on the Ved, the Holy book of Hindus, are found in the Upanishads, while the essence of the Upanishads is contained in the Gita. Many Shlokas of the Upanishads are also found in the Gita.

In the battle of the Mahabharat the armies of the Kauravas and Pandavas faced each other on the battlefield. The principal warrior on the side of the Pandavas was Arjuna, whose chariot was driven by Lord Krishna. At that moment Arjuna saw his grandfather Bhishma, his Guru Dronacharya and other who were closely related or dear to him, standing as his enemies whom he would have to kill. Arjuna became a victim of emotions and, with failing courage, was not able to determine his righteous duty at that moment. It was on this occasion that Krishna imparted to Arjuna true spiritual/religious knowledge and enlightened him on his course of action. Arjuna raised questions to which Krishna responded with appropriate answers. His words of wisdom that were of a philosophical nature became the teaching of the Gita. It consists of 700 shlokas (couplets).

The Bhagavad Gita is included among the world's foremost religious books, and has been translated into many of the leading languages of the world. Learned pandits (scholars) have written long commentaries on this short scripture.

Darshans

The Six Darshanas occupy a prominent position among the scriptures of the Hindus. The word Darshana means, observation and detailed examination. The Vedas and the Upanishads contain spiritual knowledge. They explain the relationship between God, Soul and matter. Their teachings lead mankind to the goal of God-Realization. These teaching have been discussed very deeply in the Six Darshanas. They are the books imparting philosophical teachings. What is the primordial cause of creation? How did creation take place? Is there a creator or not? How can God-realization be achieved? These are some of the subjects discussed in the Darshanas. Efforts have been made to make an intelligent quest for truth, which are supported by logic and arguments. The Darshanas have been written for the purpose of realizing the true knowledge, hence their name. They elucidate the method of finding the truth, of dispelling ignorance, of attaining liberation from sufferings, and achieving God realization.

The Six Darshanas and their authors are:

1. Nyaaya: Gautam Muni
2. Vaisheshika: Kanad Muni
3. Samkhya: Kapil Muni
4. Yog: Patanjali Muni

- 5. Mimansa: Jaimini Muni
- 6. Vedaant: Vyasa Muni

Mimansa is also referred to as Purva (former) Mimansa and Vedant is referred to as Uttar (later) Mimana.

Puranas

The Puranas record the common folklore, legends and myths of India based on the lives of various incarnations of God, as well as ancient Hindu kings and saints. They are more recent in origin than the other texts. While Puranas contain many spiritual truths and wonderful prayers similar to those previously recorded in the Vedas and Upanishads, they also contain many distortions of the original messages of the Vedas because many of the metaphors used in the Vedas and Upanishads were translated literally and described as facts. A great many devas (gods) and devis (goddesses) were invented and introduced as objects of worship.

There are 18 major Puranas and several lesser Puranas. The priestly class often promoted the Puranas over the Vedas (many priests still do the same), thus introducing incorrect practice of the Vedic Hindu religion. Idol worship often replaced the worship of God, the flexible varna (class system) was turned into a rigid hereditary caste system, and passive acceptance of one's fate was taught instead of right action. The priests often promoted expensive rituals that required substantial donations to themselves and used the Puranas as the authority. They would often frighten the petitioner by explaining to him that if he deviated even in the minutest detail from the ritual great misfortune would fall upon him.

Satyarth Prakash

The Satyarth Prakash is indeed a masterpiece written by Swami Dayanand. Just as other allied scriptures expound on the Vedic teachings, Satyarth Prakash also contains expositions and clarifications of Vedic principles. During the Middle Ages of Indian history, many faiths and sects had sprung up in religious and social spheres of Hindu Society. The people had drifted away from the teachings of the Vedas and attached greater significance to the founders of the sects and their preachings. From then onwards polytheism (belief in many Gods) commenced. Great differences developed among the different sects and divided and weakened Hindu society. The caste system based on birth became strong and gave rise to further fragmentations. Superstition, ignorance, blind faith, customary practices etc. spread fast and caused the degradation of Hindu religion and society.

It was at this time that Swami Dayanand wrote the Satyarth Prakash in order to spread the knowledge of the Vedas and to educate people, the true form and characteristics of God.

The following are some of the important topics in the Satyarth Prakash:

1. Worship of one God instead of many.
2. The upbringing of children.
3. Education as a tool to empower the masses.
4. Explanation of the main principles of the Vedas.
5. The relationship between Religion and Science and between devotion and intellect.

6. Elimination of the caste system and different religious beliefs for the strengthening of society.
7. Eradication of superstitions, false notions and meaningless customs.
8. Shunning narrow-mindedness and promoting brotherhood of man.

Other Related Texts

There are many other Hindu texts, such as the Tantras, which are far remote from the Vedas. They have not been included here because they do not fall within the scope of this book.

Buddhism and Jainism both arose in India as reform movements against the Puranic and Tantric practices of the Hindu religion. Both religions, while incorporating several aspects of the Vedic message have strayed far from the Vedas and will not be discussed.

Over the past 2,400 years, there have been many other Vedic scholars, Hindu teachers and holy men, such as Shankara, Bhaskara, Ramanuja, Madhwa, Ramanand, Kabir, Tulsidas, Guru Nanak and more, who have promoted some of the ideas contained in the Vedas but also deviated from Vedic teachings to a variable degree.

6 - Law of Karm and Punarjanm

What is Punarjanm or rebirth?

It is the re-entry or rebirth the soul into another body. The Soul is eternal and immortal. When the Soul departs the person ceases to exist or dies. When the Soul is present the person is alive. The process of re-entry of soul into another body is called Punarjanm, or rebirth. It is a continuous growth process of soul that continues until soul achieves full knowledge and gets bliss of Omniscient, Eeshvar/God. Soul then liberates from the cycle of rebirth and death. This process of liberation is called Moksh; it depends on the righteous deeds or acts or Karm of soul.

What is the meaning of Karm?

Karm is a deed, an act or activity. Everyone receives the fruits of their actions. As you sow, so shall you reap. Everyone is responsible for his or her Karm or actions. No intermediary prophet, priest, or Guru can change the consequences of one's own actions. When someone undertakes any selfless activity then it is called Nishkaam-Karm. Eeshopanishaḍ 1.2 beautifully describes this activity. Yogiraj Shri Krishna describes the Nishkaam-Karm in Geeta 2. 47, 'devotionally undertake duty and dedicate yourself to the cause.' When Nishkaam Karm is offered to the benefit of All Pervading Reality, or Omniscient Eeshvar/God it becomes Yajña.

What is Theory of Karm?

Put simply, theory of Karm states that

1. Your thoughts become reality.
2. Inversely, your present reality is nothing but a cumulative manifestation of whatever thoughts you decided to think of till date. These include both the conscious and unconscious thoughts.
3. The purpose of this reality is to help you rise above sorrow and achieve bliss. And you can change your reality to higher bliss by changing your thoughts. Thus, life is not an unplanned random chemical reaction. Instead, life and world around is a well-planned system built to guide you towards bliss. And the way to use this system effectively is through directing the thoughts towards achievement of bliss.

Does it mean happiness alone is goal of life?

Exactly. The only goal of life is to achieve happiness or bliss. And the way to achieve it is through proper understanding of the mechanism of the life system and directing our thoughts towards the most optimal use of this system.

What about those people who sacrifice their own happiness for sake of others?

They do not sacrifice their happiness, they merely sacrifice their short-term conveniences in pursuit of higher levels of happiness. The satisfaction derived from selflessness is way above the happiness derived from mundane activities. You can compare it with our own lives. As children, we enjoy many activities like eating soil. But as we grow up, we seek higher levels of pleasure and will never be eager to exchange these pleasures with many of the childish pleasures. As you will realize, the way the world has been designed, we are all closely interdependent like various molecules of water in a pond. We cannot maximize our individual happiness without maximizing the happiness of the world. So smart people trade-off their short-term conveniences for significantly higher levels of happiness derived from thinking about and acting for the betterment of the world.

Are thoughts everything? What about actions?

Thoughts are not everything. But they are the starting point and the only one in our control. Everything else including our actions are next steps of the process that starts with each thought. All we do and achieve starts as a thought in the mind. Even the thought of 'empty thinking without action' is a thought we decide to accept that leads us to the resulting consequences as per Theory of Karm. And the decision to act is also a thought we decide to accept. And as we would realize, thoughts that do not culminate into actions, in general, lead us away from bliss. In complete framework, three aspects of this thought should go hand in hand – Knowledge, Actions and Contemplation. A thought system that encompasses all the three is necessary.

How do we decide what thoughts will lead to happiness and what thoughts will not?

There are various ways to decide it. But the fundamental principle is that Truth=Bliss. Consider two forces to be operating in our lives: Knowledge and Ignorance. Knowledge leads us to truth and Ignorance away from truth. And they are controlled by our most fundamental thought – the Will or Sankalpa in Sanskrit. This Sankalpa or Will leads to further thoughts which result in consequent actions and these result in the reality we face. If we direct our Will to pursuit of Truth, we will move closer to Bliss. Otherwise, we will move away from Bliss. The rest of the ways are merely expansions of this basic principle, Truth = Bliss.

How do we decide what is truth?

There are various ways. Basically its an evolutionary approach. Decision of truth demands exclusion of all sorts of blind beliefs and an openness to change the stand as and when we get new information and

facts. The essential component is again, a Will or Sankalpa to accept the truth. The various methods include:

- A. Process of elimination: Like a smart CAT or GMAT aspirant, one should immediately reject the choices which are obviously false, based on reasoning and fact. For example, when we know that earth is round, any theory or hypothesis pertaining to the earth being flat, including those from so-called religious books should immediately be rejected.
- B. Testing for internal contradictions in an hypothesis: For example, a theory says that God is just. And then it says that He shall put more women in Hell. Now both these statements contradict each other. Hence they are worth immediate rejection.
- C. Internal analysis and reasoning: Verification of facts, etc. This is a science in itself requiring detailed analysis and contemplation. But the only prerequisite to understand it is a Will seeking truth.

How does Theory of Karm works?

It works instantaneously. Each thought in the mind produces a certain pattern of neuron firing in the mind. Based on this, various physiological changes start taking place including change in hormonal levels, heart-rate etc. Further, even the neurological patterns start adapting to this thought. Thus, if you think of same thing again and again, the neurons create a pattern that next time it is easier to take that thought process ahead. That is why we see people getting into good or bad habits. These thoughts define one's thinking patterns, and hence his or her personality, health and actions. Thus, each thought influences who we are. And by changing this thought, we can decide who we would be. Further, the same process is happening among all humans. And when we interact with them, based on our thought patterns we produce a myriad of social patterns and behaviors, which further influence who we are. Not only humans and society, this influence is also extended to nature in general because we are designed to exchange matter and energy continuously with nature. Thus we would see that merely by will-power, at times, unbelievable miracles happen in medical science. Thus thoughts become our destiny. We, the souls, are different from our body and mind. And when we die, the body and mind (brain) stop having a sustainable exchange of matter and energy with nature, and hence the system decays. But the soul, who was controlling this system, is unaffected. Now it gets into another emerging system (mind-body) and starts its journey again. Because memories are part of brain cells, they get destroyed in this migration process. But the soul carries a vital body with it which carries the Sanskaars (traits) with it. God ensures that the new system provided is the best fit for uninterrupted journey ahead for the soul. Now, based on traits, the soul develops its personality again. It also continues interaction with the world outside in the same manner as it was doing earlier and continues to evolve itself.

At each moment, God ensures that situation we face in the world is best suited for our pursuit of ultimate bliss. This is a continuous optimization process. If we exercise our will to do stupid things, stupid situations emerge and we start a descent to unhappiness. If we exercise our will to do things in pursuit of truth, we ascend. This process is uninterrupted by death.

What about animals and lower species? How can they exercise their will?

Broadly speaking, only humans have the potential to exercise their will. Other species can only accept what happens to them and cannot exercise their will? When a soul descends too low that it no more exercises its will as a human, then it gets birth as animals where these tendencies that it had collected can be purged out. Same is case with those born insane or terminally ill. Please note that it is a multi-dimensional world. So depending upon the thought patterns in these various dimensions and aspects of life, the potential combinations are virtually infinite. It is not a discrete system but completely continuous. Thus conditions vary for birth of each soul – in different species, conditions, health, society etc.

What about accidents and events on which we have no control through our thoughts?

Critically analyzing, on most of these events we have a control through our collective intelligence. Thus, collectively we all are responsible for terrorism and environmental damage. And we all can do something about it even individually. We can never absolve ourselves of any responsibility on pretext of we being one single individual, as per Theory of Karm. The birth we got on this earth was best suited to our future growth (as bliss seekers) given our traits and tendencies so far. These include our exercise of will in social aspects as well. So the events we face are also consequence of our actions. There are certain events we face without any apparent control of ours. They result out of our past actions. In any case, none of the events hamper our eligibility to seek further happiness ever. At best, there may be a temporary delay, based on theory of Karm. And even this delay can be used to further elevate ourselves on certain other aspects that we may have missed so far. Remember, its a multi-dimensional world with variety of aspects to look into.

Why do we not remember our past lives?

Because in general, they are unnecessary to fulfill our goals. Remember that this is a completely optimized process with no scope for redundancies. If we remember our past lives, we would not be able to look ahead. Thus, most of the events of even this birth are not remembered by us, forget about past life. It's a natural law that only what is relevant is remembered. And when people try to break this law by living in past, they get into a variety of mental problems because of indulgence in an unnatural act. The maximum pleasure we derive in life is by living in present and directing our efforts to future. That is why, perhaps the common word to mean Ghost and Past is Bhoot in Sanskrit.

(By the way, there are no ghosts as per Theory of Karm!)

Why we get punishment for acts of past life we do not even remember?

There is no concept of punishment and reward, in the sense we normally understand, in Theory of Karm. There is only a continuous self-correcting optimization process directed towards maximization of bliss or happiness. Unlike commonly believed, it is never that suddenly a disaster happens in life out of blue. There are no discontinuities in Theory of Karm. An example is diabetes. It does not happen overnight. In fact, bad lifestyle habits gradually lead to diabetes. And when the symptoms manifest, we term ourselves as diabetic. But in reality, this did not happen in one single day. We embarked on the path to be diabetic from the first time we did something contrary to good health habits. And each moment that we lived healthily, we stayed away from diabetes. But each moment, we ignored health issue, we were a step closer. The final manifestation of the disease represents cumulative effect of the entire journey. Now we may not remember even 1% of the acts we did to cause our diabetes, but still we turn diabetic, because of our tendencies. Similarly, even though we do not remember our past lives, our current tendencies are a cumulative summary of our entire history. Details of specific events are not important. The so called punishments that seem to come out of blue are nothing but the continuation of those traits that got manifested into visible symptoms presently. And the way out again is simple- refine our thought process. As we refine our thought process and start learning how to use our Will to increase our happiness levels, we shall stop accumulating tendencies that cause grief. And then these so-called punishments will cease to erupt.

Why do good people have to face so many miseries when they have good thoughts and good actions?

1. Happiness is a state of mind. What we often consider as misery is nothing but short-term inconveniences that anyone would gladly trade-off for higher levels of happiness. For example, when we play sports, we pant, get injured, get exhausted, but we still keep playing. The happiness we derive is much higher compared to these petty pains. In fact we enjoy this pain!
2. Many of these miseries are due to cumulative tendencies of past which start showing symptoms now.
3. Many other are similar to what happens when we start exercising after a long time. It pains for a few days because our system is not adapted to the healthy habit. But in a few days, the pain vanishes and we start getting the benefits.
4. Many other are those natural troubles which we can never get rid of in life. And one of the goals of using our Will is to learn how to ignore being affected by these mentally.
5. Some miseries are because even good people are not good in all aspects. Thus, one may be a very honest person. But he does not have a strong body and did not learn how to defend himself. He is killed by goons because he was weak. This is because of his lack of right Will in matters of health and self-defense. Remember, being powerful goes in sync with knowing truth.

Why we see bad people getting so powerful?

The inverse of above is true in most cases.

1. These bad people are never at internal peace. Nature did not design us to tolerate being corrupt, cheat, criminal, crooked etc. Even if we learn to ignore symptoms, these do cause their adverse effects. Despite having material power, these people are the most unhappy ones within their innerselves – always insecure, tense, trusting none and facing mental/emotional troubles. Bad habits or bad traits are like unhygienic or junk food.
2. Again, the world is multi-dimensional. Good or bad is not a singular adjective to give to anyone. One may be bad in almost all aspects of life, but has great confidence, self-belief and tact, which are positive traits. Accordingly, he would succeed in certain areas of life including material aspects, but would fare miserably in other areas.

What is the purpose of Theory of Karm?

The Theory of Karm reveals that we all can achieve the ultimate levels of bliss. It's a complete meritocracy with no favoritism or whimsicalness. As we think, so we become. It all depends on direction and intensity of our thoughts. If we examine life critically, we will get enough clues to see this theory at work. And we can then use them to gain our happiness, without depending on others' whims.

Does God test us?

No, God never tests us. That's a false notion. God only manages this system as per Theory of Karm for us. and has left us free to decide our fate. What we think to be a test by God, is nothing but our own previous traits that we are battling.

What is the goal of life?

To gain ultimate level of happiness, by using this Theory of Karm.

Even Sex, Boozing, Sensuality etc. give us happiness? Is it right as per Theory of Karm?

No, they do not give happiness. Instead they create an illusion of happiness by numbing our senses and intellect. Anything that causes us to act without using the faculty of thinking, is actually a surest recipe for miseries. Our happiness increases only when the source of that happiness is less and less dependent on external sources. This can happen only through knowledge accumulation and acting with full-control over mind. Another way to look at it is by asking ourselves, "What is the purpose of this act?" If answer is

merely entertainment or habit or other vague excuse, that's not the right act as per Theory of Karm. The goal of life is to liberate ourselves from these false excuses by enhancing our knowledge. And any act that numbs us moves the vehicle in opposite direction.

Does God forgive all our past sins, if we seek apology for our misdeeds?

Does that happen in real life? Do we get healed after an accident due to careless driving by saying sorry? If one could get away so easily by saying sorry, people would get lazy and simply say sorry when troubles come. Nature and its laws are nothing but God's creation. The rules that apply here are applied elsewhere also. In Vedic parlance, it is called, "Yatha Pinde, Tatha Brahmaande" – Whatever happens in micro-system happens elsewhere also. There is no place for apology in Theory of Karm. There is scope only for improvement. And this is exactly like starting to exercise after years of laziness. It will pain initially. The body system will take time to adapt to it. But the more the will-power, the better we come in shape. No miracles! But sure-shot progress will definitely happen with right Will.

Is there a framework to understand how to start using this Will properly?

There is indeed the framework of Vedic Yog for this. This has nothing to do with the so-called physical postures or acrobatic exercises you see. This is an approach to master the Self and master the art and science of living each moment as per Theory of Karm. It is extremely intuitive and based on sound principles that anyone can appreciate. It's the only system that works. But it's a practical science and needs practice like martial arts or gymnastics.

Where can I learn it?

You are already learning it. You need to be on path of Truth and Happiness. Its an automatic internal process. Experts can help you distill the knowledge so that you can apply it in your life and get results faster. But remember, unlike other arts, this is a process of internalizing. A teacher or guide can only provide directions and you will have to decide as per your own intellect. In the Theory of Karm, there is no transfer of responsibility. That remains 100% yours.

7 - Virtuous Values and their importance

INTRODUCTION – VALUE

God has blessed all living beings with a mind. The life styles of these beings are formed on the basis of the nature of the qualities that are in their minds. Every specie is born with its appropriate character, lives with that character, and dies with it.

For example, a dog is born with the quality of gratitude; it lives with it, and ultimately dies with it. The dog does not choose the quality of gratitude and follow it. It is born with that quality. Thereby, the dog cannot give up its quality of gratitude. All animals are born with certain qualities at birth. They are unable to change their qualities. No animal can select a quality and follow it. It is not possible for an animal to change its character or nature. A cow will always be a cow and a lion will be a lion, in character. Therefore, it is not possible for the animals to improve the quality of their life and the degree of happiness that they can experience. Whatever type of food was eaten by a lion that lived hundred years ago, the same type of food is eaten by the lion today. There is neither progress nor regression in the lives of animals.

How about human beings? Human beings are given two characteristics that have not been given to animals.

1. Self-consciousness (Self-awareness): Man is aware of himself. He can identify his own body. He can observe his mind and find its characteristics.
2. Free-will: Man has an intellect which provides him the opportunity to choose and function. Man can know the positives and negatives in his mind. He also has the capacity to transform his qualities; he can either improve the quality of his life and the degree of his happiness, or he can depress them.

Only man can experience the higher degree of happiness that results due to qualities such as sacrifice, and forgiveness. By taking up austerities, man alone is capable of transforming his mind.

The code of ethics is necessary only for those beings that have the characteristics of Self-consciousness and Free-will. Where there is no opportunity to choose, there is no point in advising – “Do this; don’t do that”. Babies and the mentally-challenged do not have the ability to choose and function. Thus, the code of ethics does not apply to them. The normal human definitely needs the code of ethics.

Man, being self-conscious and functioning as per his free-will, should function in a manner whereby it augments his own welfare and happiness. He need to steer his mind to act in the manner that will result in his own welfare. Thus, he must be aware of the mental discipline that he needs.

Requisites of the mind

When the mind gets the qualities of steadfastness and purity, it functions as our best friend and makes our life to blossom. Mind requires the two important disciplines:

Concentration power (Chitta Ekaagrataa)

When a task is undertaken, the mind should not get distracted. It should focus with full involvement on that task. For example, when we are reading a book, our mind should concentrate on the task of reading. Practice of dhyana gives the power of concentration to the mind.

Virtuous Values (Sadguna)

A mind that has good values is a pure mind. And, that which has negative qualities is an impure or a sick mind. Purification of the mind is achieved in two ways.

1. By acquiring good qualities
2. By removing evil qualities

Definition of Values

That quality of mind which results in our welfare and that of others is said to be a good value (virtue).

That quality of mind which results in harm to us and others is said to be a bad quality (sin).

Initially, we must identify good values and bad qualities. Thereafter, we must make the necessary efforts, to acquire those good values and remove the bad qualities. Below is a short list of good values and bad values.

Good Values and Good Behavior	Bad Qualities and Bad Behavior
Responsibility	Irresponsibility
Forgiveness	Vengeance
Honesty	Deceit
Simplicity	Incomprehensibility
Austerity	Extravagance
Service	Disservice
Gratitude	Ingratitude
Non-violence	Violence
Patience	Agitation

Courage	Cowardice
Sense-control	Immoderation
Alertness	Inattentive
Love	Hate
Truthful	Falsehood
Compassion	Disliking
Humility	Arrogance
Balance	Inconsistent
Faith	Disbelief
Bravery	Fear
Self-dignity	Self-rejection
Cleanliness	Dirtiness
Generosity	Meanness
Self-dignity	Self-rejection
Devotion	disaffection
Silence	Noise
Good-association	Bad Company
Chastity	Viciousness
Endurance	Lethargy
Non-Stealing	Stealing
Good-association	Bad Company
Humility	Pride
Factual	Gossiping

Reconcile	Revenge
Bravery	Fear
Active	Passive

Need of Values

Why do we need good values?

The code of ethics elaborates on good values and behavior. The code of ethics and living with good values are essential for:

1. Happiness at the individual level,
2. Orderly functioning of the society, and
3. Acquiring the qualifications necessary for Moksha (liberation).

Method to acquire Values

There are three steps involved in the acquisition of good qualities namely, knowledge, desire to acquire, and the effort.

1. KNOW: One has to get the basic knowledge about the values.
2. DESIRE: One must have a strong desire to acquire the values.
3. EFFORT: One must make appropriate effort to acquire the values.

Knowledge + Strong Desire + Persistent Effort = Reaching the Goal

Value of values or Importance of Values

The most important reason why we are unable to acquire a given value is because we do not realize the importance of that value (virtue). When we underestimate a good quality, our desire to acquire that quality and our effort and drive to pursue it reduce. The following helps us realise the worth of the value we seek.

Visualization of Benefit

We need to repeatedly visualize, in our mind, the benefits of the value. Only when we realize the benefit that will accrue upon adopting a value, we would develop a liking for that value. For example always pursuing truth in our interactions with others, generates a sense of happiness in ourselves and saves us from any fear of being caught if we are not truthful. Moreover, others develop trust in us and our words and deeds.

Visualization of the Loss

Realizing the loss that would result to us if we do not possess a particular virtue would motivate us to acquire that virtue. Just as the realization of the benefit from a value is important, so is the realization of the loss on account of not having that value.

Vow

It is not possible at all to pursue and practice the entire set of the values, all at the same time. We should investigate and identify the virtue that we need to acquire immediately and give priority to it. We must resolve to acquire that prioritized value. A vow is a command that we give ourselves. Only when we compel our mind with such a vow, then only we become free from weaknesses such as laziness and tendency to postpone, and can progress steadily. If we give too much of liberty to our mind, it would not function to realise that resolve. We must therefore take the pursuit of the virtue that we desire as a vow.

Good Association (Satsang)

With a view to acquire a virtue, someone undertaking the effort alone may at times find it difficult or may even be unable to continue. However, if he/she were to start the company of other virtuous persons, due to such association (satsang) he/she remains inspired and finds a new strength to pursue his/her goal. Within a group pursuing like goals, one develops greater strength rather when pursuing the goal individually.

Satsang (sat+ sang): “sat” means good, and “sang” indicates association. Satsang means association with good persons.

When one feels unable to pursue righteous goals individually, he/she should seek the assistance of other good people to derive inspiration, vigor, and succeed.

Penance

Often our mind pursues good behavior out of fear of punishment. That is an attempt to utilize the feeling of fear in a positive manner. Acquiring a positive quality or giving up a negative quality is often a difficult task. Many times, while pursuing our goal, due to inattention, laziness, and other causes, we tend to commit mistakes again and again. We get out of track over and over again. Giving ourselves an appropriate penance/punishment is a good approach to deter such occurrences. That is real atonement.

Self-reward

Everyone needs encouragement from time to time. Just as we need to be punish ourselves for our mistakes, we also have to encourage ourselves through rewards. While seeing the progress that still needs to be made, we should also see what has been achieved. Self-appreciation serves as incentives to further pursue the goal with enthusiasm.

Seeking support

To pursue a virtue that we have taken as the goal, we should seek and find another value that will be of assistance. It is not possible to attain any given virtue, alone by itself. In order to attain that value, assistance of certain other values could be necessary. For example, if we are pursuing the virtue of 'not hurting others by our words', we need the assistance of two values (i) being careful and (ii) limited speech. Similarly, if we wish to pursue dhyana (meditation), we need discipline in both food and sleep. Every virtue is closely connected with certain other values. In order to pursue a given value, we must pursue it in association with other connected values.

Satvik Quality (Satva Guna)

The functions of the mind are propelled by the three gunas (natures), namely Satva guna, rajo guna and tamo guna. When Satva guna has a dominating influence, the mind experiences peace and right knowledge; under rajo guna the mind experiences desire and vacillation; and under tamo guna it experiences delusion, sloth, etc.

By their very nature, one or the other of the three gunas has a predominant influence and propels the mind, in turns. When Satva guna predominates, and the other two gunas, (raja guna and tamo guna) are subservient, such mind is said to be satvik.

Attaining virtues becomes easy only for a person who has acquired a satvik mind. Only a mind that has attained Satva guna will get the right knowledge about virtues, and it will lead us on the right path.

Prayer (Prarthana)

Prarthana is prayer to God, after putting laborious effort. We can undertake such Prarthana by three means:

1. Physical action, emanating from our body
2. Vocal action, emanating through our speech
3. Mental action, emanating from our mind

Every action has to produce a definite result. Prayer being of the nature of an action (a Karma or action), there has to be a corresponding result. One who prays with faith and devotion in God would definitely get the due result. Through prayer, our ego gets sublimated and we receive strength from God.

We need strength in proportion to the goal that we seek to achieve. It is possible to easily acquire worldly objects, with our monetary and physical strengths. But, it is not an easy task to remove the evil tendencies from our mind and acquire good qualities. When we have selected such a difficult goal, we need commensurate strength to achieve it. We cannot get the necessary strength from external sources. It is only from the Almighty God that we can get the required strength.

Conclusion

Understanding the nature of the virtue that we desire to acquire, we must engage in the right effort, and persist to acquire the same. Thus for each value we have to investigate different aspects, such as, the definition and nature of the values, the benefits that we derive from these values, the losses that we would incur if these values are not imbibed, and the type of efforts that we should undertake to acquire these values.

Initially the pace of progress could be slow, somewhat like the proverbial tortoise, but the progress would continue to be steady.

Spiritual practice is the refining of the mind . Cultivation of good values in our mind and the removal of bad qualities from the mind are part of the refinement of the mind. After acquiring all types of prosperity such as wealth, relations, and so on, we have to ultimately live with our own mind. Living with a refined and pure mind is indeed a life of prosperity and fulfillment.

SELF-RESPONSIBILITY (SVADHARMA)

To step onto the path of maturity, one must shoulder responsibility.

God provides food for every bird, but not in its nest.

A newborn child does not have any responsibility. Responsibility is a value that one should develop along with one's physical growth. Indeed, it is the sense of responsibility that establishes that we have grown. Children observe elders and have a dream that they too should become adults. They do not wish to continue to be children. A child respects only those who are responsible for their words and deeds.

Only when we have the sense of responsibility would we be able to respect ourselves. In its absence, we would not have self-respect. Crossing childhood is equivalent to developing responsibility. Moreover, people respect only those who have a sense of responsibility. Those without a sense of responsibility cannot respect themselves, nor can they can earn others' respect.

All the thoughts that arise in our mind do not have the ability to propel us into action. It is only when the sense of responsibility develops in our mind, that we can transform thoughts into actions. Thus, the ability to gear into action vests with the sense of responsibility.

At every stage of our life, the sense of responsibility in the duties that we have to perform is a very important virtue that needs to be nurtured. Mere knowledge about what our duty is, will not result in efficiency in performing our tasks. Only when we feel the sense of responsibility in that duty, can we function, but even in this context we eventually must carry out the desired deeds. Thus, just the knowledge as to what should be done and what should not be done would not yield the results. When

the sense of responsibility combines with knowledge, we can perform what we should do and avoid what we should not do.

We should realize that we alone are solely responsible for improving ourselves, in all possible ways. Our parents, teachers, friends, and relations could help in raising us, but only we have to elevate ourselves. In the same manner, none else could depress us. We raise/uplift ourselves, and we discourage ourselves. As and when we feel and demonstrate that we are a responsible person, then alone have we grown mentally. Till such time, whatever might be our physical age, we remain childish.

Different situations in which we should have the sense of responsibility.

Responsibility in actions that are to be done

At first, we should develop the sense of responsibility in the actions that we have to perform. The mere knowledge that we have to do a certain action will not engage us in performing that action. Only our sense of responsibility would give us the thrust to act. Often, though we are well aware of what our duties are, still we do not perform them properly, as we do not feel the sense of responsibility.

Responsibility in actions already done

We should feel that we alone are responsible, for all our actions. On many occasions, we tend to shift the blame on others or on circumstances for our wrong actions. And, we do not own-up responsibility for our actions. When we scuttle our responsibility in this manner, our progress in life gets hampered. Further, at that time we lose the power to correct and transform ourselves. The sense of responsibility gives us self-respect, and the power to rectify our weaknesses. And when we give up the sense of responsibility, we lose the power to function. In the process, we also lose the power to put up efforts for our progress. Therefore, sense of responsibility becomes a very important factor for one's progress.

Responsibility in actions left undone

Just as it is essential to take responsibility for an action that we have done, so should we take the responsibility for failing to perform an action that we should have done.

We are responsible for what we have said, we are also responsible for what we have not said.

When there are several duties in front of us, if we fail to perform them and give them up, for such non-performance of the duties, we must bear responsibility. If in a situation where we should have spoken, if we do not speak-up, we are responsible for that lapse. Thus, we have responsibility both for the actions that we have done, and for the actions that we failed to do. When we understand this principle, we will not attempt to give up our duties.

Responsibility in not taking over others' responsibilities

Just as we have responsibility, each and every other person has responsibilities. It is important for us to take responsibility for our duties and equally important that we do not take responsibility for the duties of others. Indeed, it would be wrong on our part to take on the duties of others. Due to affection for his son, a father might take the son's responsibility. When he does so, the father himself becomes a hurdle to his son's development. A mother's responsibility should be left only to the mother. Thus, it becomes an important responsibility of ours not to take on others' responsibilities.

When we think of the sense of responsibility, we should investigate carefully and understand as to where we have responsibility and where we do not. Often, in situations where we do not have any responsibility, we imagine that we have responsibility, and engage ourselves in unnecessary actions. And we also end up with guilt complex.

Responsibility in giving up responsibilities

It is important that we should give up responsibility, according to time and place. Taking up a responsibility that is greater than our strength and capacity, as well as not giving up responsibility at the right time, are both incorrect. We observe many parents who fail to give responsibilities to their grown up children.

NON-VIOLENCE (Ahimsaa)

Ahimsaa Paramo Dharmah - Ahimsaa (Non-violence) is the supreme virtue.

Ahimsaa means non-violence, the avoidance of hurt, both to us and to other living beings. We hurt others with actions of mind, body and speech

Need for Ahimsaa

We all desire to improve ourselves and succeed both in the worldly and the spiritual aspects of life. The most important discipline that we need to practice is Ahimsaa. Many people mistakenly think that it is not possible to practice the virtue of Ahimsaa and experiencing sorrow is an inescapable part of life. It is but natural that everyone experiences difficulties, as they cannot be completely avoided. At birth, we arrive in this world with tears. Indeed, the very first experience that this world gives us is one of sorrow. Thereafter, we experience sorrow due reasons such as hunger, disease, and so on. Sorrow is thus an unavoidable part of life. At times we observe that while attempting to avoid sorrow, we experience even greater sorrow.

Moreover, in nature's scheme we observe that for the survival of a living being, another being is required to die. Such being the case, where does Ahimsaa or nonviolence fit in?" "Is it a virtue that could be practiced?" Having such doubts, some people conclude that Ahimsaa is not a discipline to be practiced. If one were to understand the nature of Ahimsaa with clarity, then it would be clearly understood that Ahimsaa is indeed a virtue that needs to be pursued, and that it can be practiced.

The natural, unavoidable difficulties that occur to our physical body are not being referred to as Himsa (Hurt). Himsa is the sorrow that one causes to the others, due to reasons such as hatred, jealousy and anger and physical violence. Wherever it is possible for one to avoid giving sorrow to another, such avoidance of giving sorrow is termed Ahimsaa. Punishment to others, with the intention of correcting them and for their welfare is not Himsa. Thus, the incidental pain that might be inflicted by the doctor to the patient; the punishment given by the teacher to the erring student, and appropriate punishment given by the parents to their children, are not Himsa.

While experiencing sorrow, the mind is disturbed and is without peace. Such a mind cannot be focused. If the mind is disturbed, the discriminatory faculty of the intellect would not function at its best. Therefore, if our mind were to function as a proper instrument to uplift us, it should be free from sorrow, guilt complex, vacillation, confusion, and such other flaws. The mind function as a good instrument enables us to progress in our spiritual travel, free of hurdles.

Therefore the avoidance of hurt, to oneself and to others, is a very important value to be pursued. To pursue the virtue of Ahimsaa, the support of certain other good values must be taken. It is only with the help of such supportive values, could we pursue Ahimsaa. So also, to give up Himsa (violence), we should give up certain evil or negative qualities.

Causes for Himsa (Violence)

Pursuing the value of Ahimsaa, at first, we must identify the reasons due to which we continue to cause sorrow to others. Only after removing those causes, we could practice Ahimsaa. Some of the reasons why we hurt ourselves, and cause hurt to others are :

1. Hatred	2. Anger	3. Jealousy
4. Revengeful attitude	5. Uncivility	6. Lack of attention

Consequences of Himsa (Violence)

From the standpoint of code of ethics, causing Himsa to others gives a person “paap” (sin/demerit) as the result. As per the Law of Karma (as we sow, so we shall reap), the sorrow that we inflict on others is bound to return back to us. Therefore, if we wish to be free from sorrow, we should not inflict sorrow on others. The good that we do to others is punya (merit), and the harm that we cause to others is paap (demerit). Punya gives us happiness and also results in our progress in spiritual life.

It is observed that on whoever we inflict sorrow, we face enmity from them. The aggrieved too would be waiting for his/her turn to give us sorrow. Thereby, if we were to transform the people around us into our enemies, what else can we have in our mind except fear! We lose our peace of mind.

We would also be feeling sorry, one way or the other. A restless mind is not an appropriate instrument for spiritual practice.

If we continue to cause Himsa to others, our mind would lose its sensitivity. A mind without sensitivity cannot realize subtle truths. Our goal in life should be to make mind to be both steadfast and sensitive to acquire true knowledge. Himsa (violence) inhibits such mind development. This is a great truth realized from the experience of those who have attained developed minds.

Techniques to follow Ahimsaa (Non-violence)

In order to pursue Ahimsaa, the support of certain other values is necessary. Just as discipline is essential in aspects such as food, sleep, and activities, for dhyana (meditation) to fructify, similarly, discipline is necessary in the case of Ahimsaa. There are several methods to pursue Ahimsaa. Among them, we will briefly discuss techniques such as:

1. Vow or Resolve	2. Removal of hatred	3. Giving up Anger	4. Removal of jealousy
5. Forgiveness	6. Control of speech	7. Kindness	8. Don't discriminate
9. Avoiding meat eating	10. Self-protection	11. Prayer	12. Knowledge

Benefits of Ahimsaa

The benefits that accrue due to the pursuit of Ahimsaa are incomparable. To pursue Ahimsaa, the support of certain other values is necessary. In the pursuit of Ahimsaa, we acquire these other virtues.

A mind filled with good qualities is said to be a pure mind. Mental purity alone gives us long lasting happiness. Further, purity of mind is essential in order to attain Moksha (Liberation). Tapah (austerity) gives us good health; but overdoing the austerities would reduce the physical strength. So also, when sorrow affects the mind beyond limits, it loses its strength. Through Ahimsaa, we get both physical and mental strength needed to attain the goal of life.

The capacity of discrimination (viveka) would manifest only in a mind that is steady and pure. Viveka is an intellectual ability; it comprises the ability to distinguish what is true from what is merely an appearance of truth, and the ability to be firmly established in the truth. Discrimination is to know the difference rationally, and 'being firmly established' is to confirm the decision. When the ability to discriminate is deluded by the impurities in the mind, the quality of our life would be low. When we practice Ahimsaa, our viveka develops, mind would become sensitive, it acquires steadiness, and it becomes a vehicle suitable for spiritual journey.

When we pursue Ahimsaa and protect others, we are also protecting ourselves. A Jiva (living being) is not born just for the sake of dying; it is born to live. The next question that arises is, "What type of life is he is

going to live?" A meaningful life is one where one is happy, and one gives happiness to others. Thus, Ahimsaa fulfills the true meaning to one's life.

8 - Agnihotra / Yajnya

Most lay persons in Indian culture usually think of Yajnya (also spelled and pronounced Yagya) as an act of performing a fire ceremony by lighting fire in the Havan kund (a sacred fire pot) and chanting select mantras, however, the fire ceremony is a very limited part of the Yajnya and is called Havan, Agnihotra, or homa. Yajnya actually means virtuous conduct in all aspects of life, it is performing virtuous Karm at all three levels: thoughts, words and deeds as well as helping others achieve the same goal. The physical fire lighted during the Havan ceremony is a reminder that we should kindle and enlighten our soul i.e. our inner spiritual self. Just as the physical fire in Havan kund by burning ghee and samagri (mixture of fragrant herbs and incense) purifies and brightens the surrounding environment, similarly we should first purify and enlighten ourselves by praying and meditating to God and doing virtuous deeds. Then we should do selfless deeds as a service for the community to make the community a better and more virtuous place for everybody.

The true Yajnya as per the Vedas, Braahman Granths, Upanishads and Gitā is the virtuous conduct of life's journey so that it gets closer to God and eventually attains God realization. The book Shatpath Braahman states that *Yajnyo vai shreshthamam Karma* i.e. Yajnyas are the most important Karmas/deeds in life. In Gita, Yogeshwar Krishna says the following to Arjuna about Yajnya: *Shreyān dravyamayād Yajnyat jnyaanYajnyah paramtapa* (Gita 4: 33). *Paramtapa* (O! Arjuna) *jnyaanYajnyah* (knowledge, educating others, virtuous conduct) is *shreyān* (superior to) *dravyamayād Yajnyat* (the Yajnyas performed with physical materials). Contrary to the correct view stated above, many Hindus have the blind faith that the ritual of doing Havan and sitting before the holy fire (agni) and putting oblations into the fire would please God and fulfill most desires of the worshipper. God is Perfection, He does not need pleasing from human beings. Moreover, God is Omniscient and cannot be fooled, He is not deceived by the bribes of empty rituals unless the Yajnya is accompanied by improvement in the conduct of life. Such Yajnyas only purify the ambient environment depending upon the incense and herbs burnt but not much more.

Maharshi Dayanand Saraswati in his books describes five types of Yajnyas one must do.

1. Brahma Yajnya is a daily individual (personal) meditation, also called Sandhyaa, Sandhyaa Yog-Upasana, or Eeswar-Stuti-Prarthanaa-Upasana. It also includes personal swaadhyaya, i.e. listening to and/or reading of Vedas and related scriptures that promote truth as well as self-reflection on what one has learnt and incorporated the virtuous values in one's personal life.
2. Deva Yajnya i.e. Havan or Agnihotra is a group activity including family and others.
3. Pitri Yajnya is serving with devotion one's living mother, father and elders.
4. Balivaishvadeva Yajnya is offering food and taking care of helpless human beings and other beings e. g. animals, birds who are dependent on us.
5. Atithi Yajnya is honoring and serving learned virtuous guests who visit us.

The root word for Yajnya is yaj which according to Sanskrit dictionary has three meanings.

1. Devapoojaa: which means poojaa i.e. honoring or worshipping of devas. The word deva means those persons who are always doing good for mankind and the universe. They are the embodiment of virtue or Dharm. In the Vedas and related scriptures such persons are called devas. They are generous selfless persons; they give to others without expecting anything in return. People such as they deserve honor and respect and are considered godly or saintly persons. Depending upon the context, besides generous noble persons, father, mother, respected elders; physical entities such as space, fire, air, water and earth because of their helpfulness to mankind are also called deva. In many Ved mantras, God is also called Deva or Mahaadeva (Greatest Deva) because God is always giving to all beings without even their asking, God is the Giver to all givers. Havan/Agnihotra is an example of Deva Poojaa.

The word Poojaa means respecting, honoring or worshipping others but unfortunately has often been corrupted into wrong ritual practices. How does one respect, honor or worship God? God has no shape or form and He is Perfection, God does not need anything from human beings. Therefore, one respects God or pays homage to Him by following His teachings as given in the Ved and other related scriptures, by living virtuously, helping fellow beings and taking good care of God's creation earth and its resources. How do you honor other human beings who are devas? You do so again by following their virtuous teachings and actions as well as by helping them and fulfilling their necessary needs. Unfortunately, Poojaa in Hindu religion often means going to a temple and bowing before a moorti (icon, idol) of a Hindu deity and offering a donation of money, sweets and sometimes animal sacrifice. Such Poojaa is futile because the inert moorti is incapable of delivering anything in return. Such Poojaa is a deceptive scheme of temple priests to fleece gullible public.

2. Sangatikaran: which means keeping company of virtuous noble/virtuous/learned persons and includes swādhyaya which means listening to and/or reading of Ved and related scriptures that promote truth and virtuous conduct. Organized group religious activities and ceremonies in Vedic Dharm (and Hindu religion) are called Satsang. This Sanskrit word literally means the company or gathering of seekers and followers of truth . This gathering can be at a temple, some other place of worship or a person's home as long as the purpose is to promote God, truth and Dharm. We learn from each other and are likely to follow the habits and customs of the company we keep. It is at a Satsang where one is likely to hear an inspiring sermon, find a guru or meet a peer devotee. Swādhyaya is listening to and/or reading of Vedas and related scriptures that promote truth as well as self-reflection on what one has learnt and incorporated the virtuous values in one's personal life.
3. Daan: which means donating for worthy causes. In the Vedas and other related texts there is much emphasis on being generous and giving to others (Rig Ved 1:29:4; Rig Ved 10:117:6; Atharva Ved 3:24:5; and 20:74:4). In Sanskrit, giving (charity) is called Daan (or daanam), and it is usually grouped into three categories called Tan, Mana and Dhan. Tan is giving in the form of bodily or physical service. Mana is giving at mental or word level and Dhan is monetary or material giving. All three types of giving are praiseworthy and noble, and depending upon the

circumstances, one may be more important than the others. The most difficult form though, is selfless (volunteer) service at the physical level. An example would be to tend to the physical needs of a differently abled person unknown to you or to bring food to the hungry. The next level of selfless giving is to provide mental support, such as counseling or encouraging someone, giving a lecture or writing a book to inspire others or promote virtue. The last level is donating money or gifts to charitable organizations where others take care of needy people; this is the easiest of the three types of donations. A few caveats about giving (charity) include: Give only to deserving people or causes in a selfless manner with no desire for fame or recognition. And, donations of ill-gotten money to atone for one's sins is futile.

Vedas place great emphasis not only on being generous, but also on working together with other persons for the welfare of all human beings. DevaPoojaa, sangatikaran, and Daan, all imply that we should work together with like minded persons for the welfare of society and all human beings. Most of the prayers in the Vedas are for "us" rather than for "me," with great deal of emphasis on being generous and sharing with others, this allows one to receive God's blessings. While one should make all possible effort in making personal physical, mental and spiritual progress in life, one should never be completely satisfied in one's personal progress only, but should also make an effort for the physical, mental and spiritual well being of the society at large. The last sukta (hymn) of Rig Ved has four mantras, in which God instructs human beings to think, discuss and work together for the betterment of mankind. One Ved mantra from this hymn states the following:

Sam gachchhadhvam sam vadadhvam sam vo manāmsi jānatām.

Devābhāgam yathā poorve samjānānā uapāsate. (Rig Ved 10: 191: 2)

This Ved mantra is a message from God to all human beings and states that, just as in the past deva i.e. sages and generous persons united in thoughts, words and deeds (that are based on truth), have worshipped God and pursued fulfillment of worthy personal and societal goals, so should you. May all of you move ahead united to do good deeds for others, may all of you speak with one united voice, and may all of your minds and thoughts be united for pursuit of truth and common good.

Yajnya, as would be obvious from above presentation, incorporates many aspects of living and includes personal virtuous moral conduct, prayer, worship, Sandhyaa, meditation, and group activities including Havan/Agnihotra and fulfillment of other virtuous societal goals. The emphasis of this is on Sandhyaa and on Havan/Agnihotra.

Brahma Yajnya : Sandhyaa

Explained in next Chapter

Deva Yajnya: Havan/Agnihotra

Havan/Agnihotra as stated earlier on page ... is a component of Deva Yajnya and is an example of deva Poojaa which means Poojaa i.e. honoring or worshipping of devas, sangtikaran i.e. company of fellow

truth seekers and dān giving/donating back to the society and the physical universe which makes our life more fruitful. The word deva is used both for Dharmic/virtuous, generous selfless persons who give to others without expecting anything in return as well as for physical entities such as space, fire, air, water and earth because of their helpfulness to mankind. Havan/Agnihotra is performed as a fire ceremony by lighting fire in the Havan kund (a sacred fire pot: see below), chanting select mantras as prayers, and putting oblations of ghee and samagri (mixture of fragrant herbs and incense) to purify and brighten the surrounding environment. Havan is usually is a group activity including family, friends, and other respected members of the society and is often conducted as part of weekly or daily satsang (see below for details). Thus, Havan has spiritual aspects both at a personal (Aadhyaatmic) and group (Aadhibhautic) level as well as physical (Aadhidaivic) aspects.

The physical fire lighted during the Havan ceremony is a reminder that at a personal level we should kindle and enlighten our soul i.e. our inner spiritual self. Just as the physical fire in the Havan kund by burning ghee and samagri (mixture of medicinal as well as fragrant herbs and incense) purifies and brightens the surrounding environment, similarly we should first purify and enlighten ourselves by praying to God and doing virtuous deeds. At a group level we honor learned persons and elders who give us knowledge and share their wisdom so we may live better and more virtuously. As part of the Havan ceremony, we pray to God to enlighten us by giving us new inspirations, new thoughts that change and transform our current life whereby every day we progressively become more virtuous in our actions i.e. follow Dharm as well as get rid of ignorance, false beliefs, wrong or non-virtuous deeds (aDharm), fears, doubts, lack of peace, and unhappiness in life. After getting rid of all of these sorrows producing obstacles in life, we ask for God's grace to acquire wisdom, strength, courage, bravery, happiness and joy in life. Moreover, we make a commitment to do selfless deeds as a service for the community to make the community a better and more virtuous place for everybody.

The physical aspects of Agnihotra/Havan are a scientific physical-chemical process where an inverted pyramid shaped metallic vessel called Havankund (for bigger/larger Havans a properly prepared earthen pit, often lined with bricks) is utilized to light a fire burning special wood sticks, ghee, herbs and incense at a high temperature to purify the environment. The fire temperature in the vessel is several hundred degrees Fahrenheit, higher than an open wood fire. Fire is utilized for Havans because it has the power to bring out the manifold characteristics of an object. For example, spices in a spice bottle have only a faint odor, but when roasted in fire they fill the whole house with fragrance. In the Havankund kindling usually obtained from trees containing milky sap such as mango or ficus trees are burnt. These woods catch fire quickly, burn fast and produce higher temperature. Their woods burn completely and produce minimal carbon monoxide. To further increase their burning ability, small amounts of ghee obtained from cow's milk is slowly poured with a spoon. As the Havankund kindling fire enhanced/stoked by ghee becomes roaring, then oblations of samagri—a mixture made of herbs and incense as described below is sprinkled over the fire. The samagri is made by mixing four different types of products in special combinations based upon the season. These include (i) medicinal herbs which promoting wellness and prevent disease; (ii) fragrant herbs or dried flowers like saffron, kasturi; (iii) energy producing substances like ghee, dried coconut; and (iv) sweet substances like jaggery, dates, raisins. All four are mixed and pounded into a coarse samagri powder. About 40 to 50 select herbs, grains, dried leaves, flowers, roots

or fruit are utilized to make proper samagri. When such samagri is sprinkled over fast burning kindling they produce large amounts of special fragrant gasses, which in Vedic scriptures are called bshhaj vayu i.e. healing herbal penetrating gasses which can rise high and permeate in the atmosphere to cleanse the air and water vapors as an anti-pollutant and kill harmful bacteria. This results in the purification of thousands of cubic meters of air both near the earth's surface level as well as high in the atmosphere. Subsequently, the rains that fall are made of good clean water instead of polluted rain like acid-rain, or contaminated with chemicals. Thus, the whole ecosystem has less pollution. It is a misconception on part of some people that Havan/Agnihotra is waste of money and other precious resources as well as polluting to earth by the smoke created. Instead, as described above, Havan in fact cleanses the air and atmosphere and causes cleaner rain.

Once atmospheric air and water are clean, the earth also gradually becomes cleansed and less chemically polluted. Thereafter, foods grown in the soil such as grains, vegetables and fruits, herbs, herbal medicines all become purer, devoid of harmful chemical contamination. Once the various foods we eat are pure, our physical body and its various parts also become pure and we are less likely to get diseases. Moreover, as our body has less harmful chemical contamination, it positively affects our mind and intellect and makes them more virtuous. Our soul then has good thoughts, our words are honest and true, and we do virtuous deeds. On the other hand, when pollution prevails, our mind has wrong thoughts, our words and deeds also become wrong and impure. This benefit is not only for human beings but is extended to all other living things such as animals, birds, insects and plants.

Organized group congregational activities and ceremonies in Vedic Dharm, the sangatikaran component of Havan/Agnihotra is called satsang. The Sanskrit word satsang literally means the company or gathering of truth seekers and truth followers. This gathering can be at a temple, some other place of worship, or a person's home as long as the purpose is to promote God, truth and Dharm. At some religious institutions in India, satsang is a daily event, while at others it is a once weekly activity. Vedic Dharm recognizes humans as social beings NOT social animals. We learn from each other and are likely to follow the habits and customs of the company we keep. It is at a satsang where one is likely to hear an inspiring sermon, find a guru or meet a peer devotee. Moreover, children and the uninitiated are often initially attracted to the performance of the religious rites and ceremonies like Havan/Agnihotra. Thus, Havan can be a wonderful way to introduce prayer and worship of God, which gradually pave the way for deep meditation. Children, however, must be taught that the true intent of the Havan and that the Havan ceremony is not an end in itself or a substitute for following Dharm or personal meditation. In his simple, yet descriptive words, Kabir said the following about satsang:

“The company of the good and wise is like fragrance emanating from a perfumery,
Wisdom comes like the fragrance, whether one is a perfume buyer or a passerby.”

9 - Brahm Yajnya - Sandhyaa - Twilight Meditation

Brahma Yajnya means individual (personal) meditation upon Eeshvara/God and is called Sandhyaa, Sandhyaa-Upasana or Sandhyaa Yog-Upasana. The Sanskrit word Sandhyaa is derived from its root words sam and dhya which simply mean sam i.e. to do very good or proper dhya i.e. meditation of God. In Sandhyaa the focus is on upaasanaa i.e. dhyana but it also incorporates all three components Eeshvar-stuti-prārthanā-upaasanaa i.e. praise, prayer and meditation of Eeshvara. Brahma Yajnya also includes personal swadhyaya i.e. listening to and/or reading of Vedas and related scriptures that promote truth as well as self-reflection on what virtuous values one has truly learnt and incorporated the same in one's personal life i.e. in one's actions/deeds, but these two aspects will not be the focus of this book.

Sandhyaa is not a rote recitation or chanting of select mantras or hymns from the Vedas and other Vedic scriptures. Sandhyaa implies contemplating upon the teachings of the mantras especially on the attributes of God and doing dhyana i.e. meditating on them. Sandhyaa as advised by Maharshi Dayanand Saraswati incorporates in an indirect manner all of the eight steps of Yog as described by Rishi Pātanjali in Yog Darshan.

It has often been asked, 'Why do Sandhyaa? What are the benefits of belief in God, prayer, and meditation?' According to Vedic traditions, true Sandhyaa-upaasanaa provides a person inner joy and strength to do the right thing and follow the path of virtue in life. One's spiritual knowledge expands and deepens. Ability to concentrate is increased and the intellect becomes sharp both in spiritual and secular affairs so that one can easily solve knotty problems. One is able to see things clearly as they are and differentiate right from wrong. The will power is tremendously strengthened and the person learns to complete tasks instead of finding excuses. Vanity is removed; one becomes humble and develops love and compassion for others instead of hate and jealousy. One's fears in life are removed and the ability to withstand setbacks or even extreme miseries in life are markedly enhanced. One becomes willing to die for the sake of truth or freedom. This is in contrast to dying as a terrorist who kills innocent people after being brainwashed by the exhortations of fanatic religious leaders; such a person is committing suicide and squandering a precious life given by God.

A person does not need praise or accolades from others to do the right thing; rather, the virtuous path becomes one's inner conscious. Finally, a person achieves Eeshvar/God realization and enjoys bliss and peace in life with God as one's constant Companion. If one does not attain Moksh after this cycle of life and death despite living a virtuous life, one is born at a higher station in next life to have opportunity to get even closer to God and attain Moksh.

As one progresses in dhyana-upaasanaa (i.e. meditation upon God) and one gets closer and closer to God, the person's soul starts to acquire a small element of the attributes of God based upon the person's efforts and abilities. The soul acquires true knowledge from Omniscient God the Source of true knowledge. The soul acquires strength and courage from Omnipotent God. However, the soul's abilities even in the most advanced stages of dhyana Yog (asamprajnāta samādhi) remain quite limited. Whereas

God is All-Knowing—Sarvajnya the soul always has limited knowledge i.e. is alpajnya. Whereas God is Omnipresent- present everywhere at-all-times, the soul at any given time is ekdeshi—exists only in one place at a time. Whereas God is the Creator of the universe, the soul's capability to utilize prakriti—physical matter to create material things remains quite limited.

The relationship of the soul and God in the advanced stages of Yog is often compared to that of an iron ball and fire respectively. The closer the iron ball gets to the fire, progressively hotter the iron ball becomes because heat is the innate nature of fire. Also, all objects that are close to the heated iron ball also perceive the heat. Similarly, an advanced upaasanaa practitioner acquires true knowledge directly from God, as well as he/she is able to teach and enlighten others with the same knowledge especially the pupils who are close to him/her. In the final stages, when the iron ball is totally surrounded by fire for a long time, the ball acquires a red hot/golden yellow glow like the fire itself. The iron ball, looking like a fireball, is one with the flame but still is an iron ball and not the fire itself. However, if the iron ball is moved away from the fire, it first loses its glow and then gradually become cold metal and is unable to impart any heat to surrounding objects. Similarly, when an upaasanaa practitioner moves away from God, then he/she is unable to enlighten his/her pupils with true knowledge. In the same vein, even an advanced Yogi (a Yog master) who has many abilities is advised to remain humble and always remember God who is the Master of the universe and whose capabilities are endless. Moreover, he/she is cautioned never to become self-obsessed about his/her abilities and compare them to that of Eeshvar/God, claim himself/herself to be same as Eeshvar/God or an incarnation of Eeshvar/God.

The following three additional examples are often cited to explain the benefits of Eeshvar-stuti-prārthanā-upaasanaa and true faith in God:

One's inner strength and will power are tremendously increased and help a person deal with difficulties in life even when a great calamity befalls. One has the fortitude to deal with problems calmly and try to find solutions instead of drowning in sorrow and lamentations. In Maharshi Dayanand Saraswati's words, 'True faith and devotion in God give a person the courage to forbear even a huge misery the size of a giant mountain, and this is not trivial but an immense accomplishment in life'.

A person who has lost a job or other measures of earning livelihood often becomes depressed and fearful; some such persons become even paralyzed to take any action. However, a person who perceives God as his constant companion and protector would not become fearful and loose courage. He would ask for God's guidance, use his common sense and keep on making every effort to find a new path out of his misery and with God's grace usually will succeed.

A person who is feeling chilled and miserable because of cold weather and not having adequate clothing would find that when he finally manages to reach the warmth of a fire, his chill, discomfort and misery disappear. God is that Ultimate warmth in life that removes miseries. Eeshvar-stuti-prārthanā-upaasanaa is the path to God the Ultimate Bliss and with total surrender and devotion to Him one ultimately attains God realization and finds joy and bliss in life.

10 - Maharshi Dayanand - The Savior of Vedas

Early Life

Maharshi Dayanand was born on 12th February 1824 to a Brahmin hindu family in Tankara, Gujarat. His original name was Mool Shankar because he was born in Dhanu Rashi and Mul Nakshatra. His father was Karshan Lalji Tiwari, who served as the head of an eminent Hindu family of the village. His mother was Amritbai .

At the age of eight years his Yajnyopaveet Sanskaar ceremony was performed, marking his entry into formal education. As such Mool Shankar led a comfortable early life, learning Sanskrit and studying the Vedas and other religious scriptures. His father was a follower of Shiva and taught him the ways to worship Shiva. He was also taught the importance of keeping fasts. On the MahaShivraatree night, the 14-year old Mool Shankar sat awake the whole night in devotion to Shiva. He saw a mouse eating the offerings and desecrating the idol. After seeing this, he questioned that if Shiva could not defend himself against a mouse, then how could he be the savior of the massive world.

The deaths of his younger sister and his uncle caused Mool Shankar to ponder the meaning of life and death. He began asking questions which worried his parents. He was engaged in his early teens, but he decided marriage was not for him and ran away from home at the age of 22 years.

Search of truth and God

Leaving a life of comfort was not easy but Mool Shankar wandered for nearly twenty-five years as an ascetic, to quench his thirst for truth and to meet the real God. He gave up materialistic world and lived a life of self-denial, devoting himself to spiritual pursuits in forests, retreats in the Himalayan Mountains, and pilgrimage sites in northern India. During these years he was known as Shudh Chaitanya. He practiced various forms of Yog, after which Swami Poornanand initiated him into Sannyas (renunciation stage of life) and renamed him as Swami Dayanand Saraswati.

In search of a true guru Swami Dayanand met several saints, sages but they could not quench his thirst for truth. He then met Swami Virjanand Dandi in Mathura, Uttar Pradesh. Virjanand believed that Hinduism had strayed from its historical roots and that many of its practices had become impure. Society had been divided on the basis of caste, religion and malpractices. Dayananda Saraswati promised Virjanand that he would devote his life to restoring the rightful place of the Vedas in the Hindu faith.

Contributions

Taking leave from Swami Virjanand, Swami Dayanand set off to tour the nation and he felt extremely aggrieved to note the rampant malpractices in the name of Dharm, and the misuse of religion for the sake of power, position and money. He traveled the country challenging religious scholars and priests to discussions, winning repeatedly through the strength of his arguments and knowledge of Sanskrit and Vedas. Hindu priests had debarred the lower class and women from reading Vedic scriptures, and

encouraged rituals, such as bathing in the Ganges river and feeding of priests on anniversaries, which Dayananda decried as superstitions or self-serving practices.

He then ignited the spirit of spreading the knowledge of Vedas at Haridwar where he openly boycotted the superstitions and challenged anyone who claims such acts to be righteous. He not only uplifted Hindus but also proclaimed that the Ved only had the real truth irrespective of any other texts. His teachings professed universalism for all living beings and not for any particular sect, faith, community or nation. He strongly opposed idol worship and orthodox beliefs. On 22 October 1869 in Varanasi he won a debate against 27 scholars and approximately 12 expert pandits. The debate was reported to have been attended by over 50,000 people. The main topic was "Do the Vedas uphold idol worship?" As he was spreading the truth of Vedas to the world he was joined and followed by many people like Swami Vivekanand, Ramakrishna, Bipin Chandra Pal, Vallabh Bhai Patel, Shyama Prasad Mookherji who regarded Dayananda as a remarkable and unique figure. Dayanand's "back to the Vedas" message influenced many thinkers and philosophers the world over, Andrew Jackson Davis, Sten Konow and Benjamin Walker are few to name.

Dayananda Saraswati is most notable for influencing the freedom movement of India. His views and writings have been used by different writers and have influenced other revolutionaries like Subhash Chandra Bose, Lala Lajpat Rai, Ram Prasad Bismil, Swami Shraddhanand, Pandit Lekhram, Mahaatmaa Hansraj. He also had a great influence on Bhagat Singh. Swami Dayanand was the first one to voice out the term Swaraj during the freedom movement.

Swami Dayanand worked for the upliftment of women, be it women education, promoting widow remarriage, eradicating sati pratha (burning of widows on the funeral pyre of the husband) and parda (veil) system. He also uprooted untouchability and worked for the underprivileged section of society by providing equality in education for all.

In Mumbai in the year 1875 he established the first Arya Samaj. He embodied the Vedic truth as ten principles of Arya Samaj to make society a better place to live in. The same year he wrote the Satyarth Prakash to answer all the queries of a common human. It was later translated later into multiple languages for easy access across the world. And, he had many followers all over world. Dayananda Saraswati wrote more than 60 works in all, including a 16 volume explanation of the six Vedangas, an commentary on the Ashtadhyayi. Some of his other renowned books include the Sanskaar Vidhi, RigVedaadi Bhaashya Bhumikaa, Paakhand khandan, Panchmahayajnya Vidhi, Aaryodeshya Ratnamala, Rigved Bhashyam, Gokaruna Nidhi, Updesh Manjari.

Assassination

Due to his challenging and fearless talks against the rich and people in position of authority, he made many enemies too. Dayananda was subjected to many unsuccessful attempts on his life.

He was poisoned on several occasions, but due to his regular practice of Hatha Yog he survived all such attempts. Once attackers attempted to drown him in a river, but Dayanand dragged the assailants into the river instead, though he released them before they drowned.

His final journey began in 1883 when he landed in Jodhpur on the invitation of Jaswant Singh, the Maharaja of Jodhpur. The Maharaja was eager to become Dayananda's disciple, and to learn his teachings. During his stay Swami Dayanand found the Maharaja in the company of a dancing girl named Nanhi Jaan. Swami ji rebuked the Maharaja and told him to forsake her and follow the righteous path of Dharm and be a true Arya. Nanhi Jaan felt offended and revengeful and bribed Swamiji's cook, Jagannath, to poison his nightly milk. Swami Dayanand consumed the milk without any doubts and consequently became bedridden for days suffering with excruciating pain. After the doctors gave up on him and seeing Dayananda's suffering, Jagannath was overwhelmed with guilt and confessed his crime to Dayananda. On his deathbed, Dayananda forgave him, and gave him a bag of money, telling him to flee to Nepal, because if found he would be executed by the Maharaja's men. Swami Ji's health worsened day by day and doctors from other places were unable to heal him. He departed this world on the evening of 30 October 1883 at 6:00 p.m, after chanting Mantras. That day coincided with Hindu festival of Divali.

Life At A Glance

Swami Dayananda is ranked highest among the makers of modern India. He had worked tirelessly for the political, religious and cultural emancipation of the country. He was guided by reason, taking Hinduism back to the Vedic foundations. He had tried to reform society with a clean sweep, which is again needed today. Some of the reforms introduced in the Indian Constitution have been inspired by his teachings.

Contributions of Swami Dayanand to Hindu Society

1. Swami Dayanand, founder of the Arya Samaj, gave a new orientation to the entire Indian nation and Hindu society where every Hindu and Arya became aware that "Bharat" (India) is their own land and no foreigner should ever become the head of its affairs in any way.
2. He affirmed that the Vedas contained no such thing as Untouchability. He and the Arya Samaj launched a great movement against Untouchability which was later taken up by Gandhiji and Congress in a big way during the Indian Freedom struggle & post-independence.
3. Child Marriage: Maharshi Dayanand denounced the then current practice of child marriage as a curse upon society. The Arya Samaj continued the campaign. However, it is still prevalent in certain regions.
4. Maharshi Dayanand strongly opposed polygamy. Arya Pracharaks travelled widely across the villages and towns to remove this evil from the Indian society. Later, it was lawfully abolished under Hindu Code bill. The curse of polygamy is still a menace and need be controlled at all levels, especially politicians and the affluent class.
5. The AryaSamaj successfully fought the orthodox Brahmins and affirmed that idol worship is contrary to the Ved which describes God as Omnipotent, Omnipresent and formless, and

therefore He cannot be confined under lock and key anywhere nor even in the temples which had become nothing but “Religious shops” for the priests.

6. Dayanand rang a clarion call ‘Back to the Ved’ and called upon all to follow its teachings. He translated them in simple Sanskrit and Hindi along with his famous book “Rig Vedaadi Bhaashya Bhumikaa” and the “Sanskaar Vidhi”.
7. Swami Dayanand denounced the rigid caste system, and referred to the Ved which spells out that all are born equal and no one is Brahmin, Vaishya, Kshatriya or Shoodra by birth. These are only based on the profession that one chooses and each of these are complementary to each other and none is superior or inferior to the other.
8. Dayanand stirred people’s thoughts, especially amongst the Hindu Society that the West has not contributed anything towards the emancipation of the country’s welfare, rather the West owes India, every progress which they unjustifiably claim theirs, including the invention of “Zero”.
9. Dayanand strongly believed in Nationalism, based on intense dedicated, true, selfless, fearless patriotism, a thought which he propagated amongst the citizens of India, preparing for self-rule & freedom, based on equality; he dedicated a whole chapter of Satyarth Prakash” to that great mission
10. Dayanand & the Arya Samaj hit hard on the rampant blind faith and superstitions among the masses spread by various orthodox organizations.
11. He strongly campaigned for the education to all, including the study of Sanskrit, the Vedas, Upanishads and allied texts, irrespective of caste, creed, gender, etc.
12. The Arya Samaj opened its first orphanage in Ferozepur, followed by a chain of orphanages all over the country so that orphans do not convert to other religions.
13. The Arya Samaj opened homes for widows and destitute women providing accommodation , training in some useful profession to earn a decent living.
14. Dayanand and the Arya Samaj brought women at par with men-folk, sensitized the masses on the ills of the dowry system, and even put women on a higher level than men through his advocacy that the mother’s lap is the greatest centre of learning and that an educated woman will educate the whole family and by large the nation and the whole world.
15. Dayanand and the Arya Samaj gave rights to wear the Yajnyopaveet (the sacred thread) to every Hindu irrespective of one’s birth.
16. In those days, anyone who travelled overseas had to undergo penance and give away a lot of gifts to Orthodox Brahmins to be readmitted to Hindu Dharm. Dayanand got rid of such ills from Orthodox Hindu Society.
17. Maharshi Dayanand Saraswati, was the first in his era to tell the Hindu Society the difference of the meaning of good Governance and “own Independent Rule”. He instigated people to stand for self/own independent rule and to fight against the yoke of slavery of the Britishers. He was the first to proclaim that Bharatvarsh is only for Bharatvasi’s (Indian’s).
18. He emphasized on swadeshi (domestic products) as an empowerment tool for the Indian population to move out of poverty and the national economic chaos.
19. Dayanand and the Arya Samaj promoted Hindi as a National language of India.

20. The teachings of Swami Dayanand and the Arya Samaj stirred many among the Hindu Orthodox Society to become great thinkers, national leaders and revolutionaries like: Swami Shraddhanand, Pandit Lekhram, Lala Lajpat Rai, Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Bipin Chandra Pal, Shri Arvind Ghosh, Bhai Parmanand, Bhai Shyamji Krishna Verma, Bhagat Singh, Ram Prasad Bismil, Bhai Bal Mukund, Madanlal Dhingra, Madan Mohan Malviya and many others who defacto brought about the Independence of India, the decline of the British Empire and the independence of various countries from colonial rule.

11 - Arya Samaj (Introduction, Goals) and its contribution

FAQ

What is Arya Samaj?

Arya Samaj is the association (Samaj) of noble persons (Arya). The association of people with noble, virtuous & humane qualities embellishing human character transforming the “social animal” to “social human being”.

Who is Arya?

An Arya is a noble person. An Arya is recognised by his noble qualities. He/She

- ❖ Continuously strives to improve his/her external (physical) and internal (moral / spiritual) status as well as human advancement.
- ❖ Is truthful to himself/herself and to others.
- ❖ Upholds Dharm (righteousness) as an all-time compass in life to attain the goals of human life... Dharm, arth, kām & Moksh.
- ❖ Maintains perfect harmony between thoughts, words and deeds (Manasaa, vaachaa & Karmanaa); purity of mind, body and spirit which leads to spirituality, as he is mindful that divergence of thoughts, words, and deeds is the character of the wicked.
- ❖ Nurtures the nobility through his/her efforts to uplift his/her character, deeds and innate aptitudes (guna, Karm & svabhaav) to the highest order, as such nobility is not hereditary or pedigree based.

Is the Arya Samaj another religion or sect?

NO.

The word Arya is found in the Ved and means a person who is noble in thoughts, words and deeds. The foundations of the Arya Samaj rest on the evergreen, eternal and universal values of the Satya Sanatan Vedic Dharm as spelt out in the Vedas.

What is Dharm?

Dharm is righteous living. It sharpens the discriminative power of one’s intellect: It differentiates between right and wrong, proper and improper, good and bad, virtue and evil, duties/ responsibilities and carelessness, and acts accordingly.

In simple terms, Dharm is: “Treat others as you would like to be treated; and Do not treat others as you would not like to be treated.”

Ultimately, righteous living (Dharm), righteous earnings (arth), righteous use of the righteous earnings for pleasure (kaam) leads to liberation from the cycle of birth and death (Moksh).

Why Dharm?

The source of Dharm is the Ved. It is the code of conduct, to transform man into human being (Manurbhava). It empowers us to keep to the right track (shreya maarga) and not to err on the quick-fix track (preya maarga) filled with easy temporary remedies or solutions, which fail to address underlying problems.

It inculcates the spirit of universal brotherhood, the world as one family (vasudhaiva kutumbakam) thereby creating a society where people live and let live.

What do we achieve on the path of Dharm?

Dharm prompts towards the uplift of (i) the physical, (ii) mental, moral, spiritual and (iii) social betterment of all; indeed, a holistic approach to progress in all fields of life – personal, family, social, economic and political. Applied in day-to-day life, Dharm leads one and all to prioritize fulfilling needs rather than greed ...a world free from hunger, suffering, penury, overindulgence, reckless consumption, hatred, jealousy, exploitation of human by human, etc.

Where is the starting point?

The self, working out on the path of ethical living! Humans learn best by copying others, and as role models we shall motivate relatives and friends to be virtuous. We shall see eye to eye with the aims, objectives and endeavors of Arya Samaj to create a noble society.

What is the Satya Sanatan Vedic Dharm?

It means the true, pristine (Sat), and most ancient (Sanatan) path for righteous living (Dharm), as per the teachings of the Ved.

Why uphold the Ved?

The Ved is the one-and-only revelation of God to four Rishis (sages) at the creation of the human form of life in this universe. Ved is a Sanskrit word, derived from the root word 'Vid' which means knowledge.

The Ved is the source of all true knowledge, (both paraa vidyaa or spiritual knowledge & aparaa vidyaa or material knowledge). All logical and scientific, that knowledge is in seed form (spiritual, natural, physical, applied, social & other sciences).

Why the need for God to reveal the Ved?

The Ved is the manual for righteous living. Like a manual of operations accompanying various goods, especially machinery, equipment, and electrical and electronic appliances,

the Almighty God has provided the knowledge in the Vedas to guide the human to live righteously and successfully achieve life goals.

Why were the Ved revealed only to mankind?

God created all species with the inborn knowledge (svaabhaavika jnyaan) required to live - eat, sleep, scare and be scared, and breed. However, human beings possess a formidable mind power to learn, acquire new knowledge (naimittika jnyaan), and undertake reflective self-evaluation, beyond the consumption craze, ignorance, fear, and entertainment.

The Ved was revealed to human beings, the highest form of life, to live in harmony with the Creation and nature; indeed, an empowering tool to realize the 4 Purusharth:

- ❖ Dharm, a life of righteous conduct sustained by noble thoughts, words & deeds;
- ❖ Artha, righteous earnings;
- ❖ Kaama, righteous gratification from the righteous earnings; and
- ❖ Moksh, ultimately attaining long-lasting bliss, liberation from the pains and sorrows incurred in the cycles of birth and death.

What led to the foundation of the Arya Samaj?

The glory and valor of India as 'Vishwa Guru', universal teacher, mentor and spiritual leader had crumbled; the political, economic and social conditions prevailing in the nineteenth century presented to a gloomy picture of a society; reduced to nothing during the centuries of foreign domination, amongst others:

- ≡ Illiteracy and ignorance abounded; true knowledge was totally eclipsed by superstitions, irrational rituals and blind faith; the essence of Dharm (righteous living) was lost.
- ≡ Women were denied access to education in spite of their being the first university in the making of mankind; social evils (child marriage, sati system, caste system, dowry system, animal sacrifice ...etc.) widespread and cultural values eroded.
- ≡ Undue / inhuman discrimination had created various factions; the downtrodden debarred from entering the portals of temples; virtual walls greater than the Great Wall of China divided the civil society.

Is the founder, Maharshi Swami Dayanand Saraswati a new messiah?

No. No.

He emerged on the scene as a reformer at this critical period for the revival of a collapsing society. His clarion call was 'back to the Ved', and shed light on the pristine universal Vedic values such as 'may noble thoughts come to us from all sides', 'may we look at all with a friendly eye' 'the world is but one family', 'harmony of thoughts, words and deeds', undeniably bridges to connect people and bring forth the humane aspect in life.

Is the Arya Samaj only for Hindus or Indians?

No. It has a universal objective. The 6th principle of the Arya Samaj states: “The prime object of this society is to do good to the whole world, i.e. to uplift the physical, moral / spiritual and social standards of ALL.”

Such a statement is what modern management calls a ‘vision and mission statement’ and a holistic approach for a better life - personal, family, social, economic, political, etc.

What are the principles of the Arya Samaj about?

The ten principles reveal a systematic and systemic route to achieve self-realization - activate the innate potential, be fully alive and unfold the humane aspect of life.

- The first three principles deal with the sources of knowledge, God’s characteristics and the importance of the Vedas.
- The fourth and fifth principles urge all to abide by truth and virtue.
- The sixth one is a universal vision and mission statement ‘to uplift the physical, moral and spiritual standards of not only its members, the Indian or Hindu society, BUT of all in this world.
- The last four principles spell out the importance of right conduct; dispel ignorance and promote understanding; act with compassion whereby one should not be content with own progress but strive to achieve global advancement; and last but not least confer a duty on all to hold back personal interests and prioritize on collective welfare.

Is the concept of self-realization sustainable?

Yes. In a nutshell, the principles confer both rights and responsibilities:

- Rights: All, irrespective of color, creed or birth origin are eligible to common rights: equitable treatment, access to education, meritocracy, etc. ; and
- Responsibilities: upholding our duties, and shunning negligence, thus avoid social chaos; the right track to increased material and spiritual wellness.

The education system in today’s world is skewed towards rights and little or no responsibilities.

What are the prescribed observances, ceremonies and social customs in the Arya Samaj?

The Vedic philosophy states that every person has to discharge himself from the three-fold rin (obligation):

- Deva rin, gratitude to the Almighty for His Creation, the universe, a place with all the necessities (space, energy, air, water, earth, vegetation, etc.) where we live as well as for the Ved (the revelation of knowledge in seed form to mankind). We relieve ourselves through worship of God, by living life according to the laws of the Creation, respect for nature (the environment), and diligent use of resources.
- Rishi rin, gratitude to the sages, Acharyas (mentors & spiritual leaders) and Gurus (teachers & guides), for the spiritual, cultural and the great learning about truly living life as a human being and not be one only by form educational heritage, dispelling the darkness of ignorance. ☛
- Pitri rin, gratitude to parents and grandparents by genuinely serving them during their lifetime.

What is worship?

Worship consists of stuti, prarthanaa and upaasanaa.

- ❖ Stuti, praise or glorification of Eeshvar (God) is the chanting of the characteristics, deeds and attributes of God, reminding ourselves of Him being the giver of life, the prime cause of our existence. Gradually we shall immerse ourselves in these qualities, and become virtuous.

Example:

A child learns the language used in the environment he is growing, be that Hindi, English, French, Spanish, Chinese. He catches the language which he hears from morning to night.

On the other hand, one who grows in an environment where he listens to or sees only critics and negativities, he more-than-often adopts those negative attitudes in life.

Likewise when we praise or hear good speech, deeds, attributes, etc. , we gradually immerse ourselves in goodness and virtue.

- ❖ Prarthanaa, prayers are requests to the Almighty for his grace and blessings.
No effort = no results. The Almighty Eeshvar (God) is always within us ...the inner voice motivating us towards the right path.
But, we have to mold ourselves to receive that grace, else we shall only be filling water in ...a strainer, a colander, a basket, or a bottomless bucket!!!
100% physical and mental efforts towards righteous objectives = 100% success, inner peace and happiness.
- ❖ Upaasanaa is devotion and meditation.
Devotion is abiding to the ordinances of righteous living, prescribed in the Ved. It includes respecting the Creation and the laws of nature.
The benchmark is similar to “a devoted child” is one who follows parent’s guidance and “a devoted student” is one who is diligent in his studies and respectful to teachers.
Meditation is silencing of the mental and emotional activities (taming the monkey-mind) to recognise the inner-self and be in communion with the Supreme

Being, God. Long lasting inner peace and happiness goes to those whose concepts of God are authentic and logical.

What are the festivals celebrated by Aryas?

The Arya Parva Paddhati details the festivals celebrated by Aryas:

- ❖ Nava Samvatsar & Arya Samaj Sthaapnaa Divas, New Year, day of Creation of the universe & foundation of the Arya Samaj.
- ❖ Shree RamNavamee, marks the birthday of Shree Rama.
- ❖ Holi or Vasantee Navasasyeshti, marks the spring harvest.
- ❖ Shraavane, dedicated to the study of the Ved.
- ❖ Shree Krishna Janmaashtamee, marks the birthday of Shree Krishna.
- ❖ Vijayaa Dashamee, victory of Shree Rama over Ravana
- ❖ Deepaavali or (Sharadeeya Navasasyeshti) & Rishi Nirvaan, marks the autumn harvest & demise of Maharshi Dayanand.
- ❖ Swami Shraddhanand Balidaan Divas, commemorating the martyrdom of the great stalwart.
- ❖ Makar Sankraanti or Uttaraayana, marking an astronomical event, the sun moves from the southern to the northern hemisphere.
- ❖ Vasant Panchamee, marks the fifth day of spring and focus on acquisition of knowledge.
- ❖ Seetaa Ashtamee, marks the birthday of Seetaa.
- ❖ Dayanand Dashamee, marks the birthday of Swami Dayanand.
- ❖ Rishi Bodh Mahotsav, marks the enlightenment of Swami Dayanand.

Contribution of the Arya Samaj to mankind

What has the Arya Samaj contributed to the world?

The Arya Samaj, true to its mission and vision statement of doing good to the whole world had a unique contribution to, amongst others, the following:

- ❖ Liberation from colonialism, dominance; Rights to self-determination; Svarajya or self-rule, independence as the foundations of a dignified human life.
- ❖ Revival of the importance of the pristine knowledge of the Ved, the One-and-Only revelation as the true knowledge in seed form for the benefit of humanity at large, not for a few (Swami Dayanand's clarion call - Back to the Vedas).
- ❖ Revival of the Gurukula system of education for the holistic development of the growing generation.
- ❖ Breaking the man-made discriminating barriers, such as the rigid caste system, blind faiths, superstitions, irrational beliefs.

- ❖ Bridging the human deficit, i.e. ignorance by empowering the human capital with knowledge.
- ❖ Opening access to education, health services, food, shelter and clothing as birth right.
- ❖ Promoting a duty-based culture (responsibility & accountability).
- ❖ Leading people to live spirituality as spiritual reality.
- ❖ Fostering ethical living (the universal edicts of Dharm), cutting across faiths and practice of worship, and the true concept of secularism as a faith in light and on truth.
- ❖ Laying the principles of a humane construct of society, selflessness as opposed to selfishness (4th to 10th principles of the Arya Samaj). .
- ❖ An all-inclusive approach to physical, spiritual, social, intellectual, scientific and economic development.
- ❖ Advocacy for rationalizing religion and spiritualizing mundane sciences.
- ❖ Social justice, treatment of all by all should be with love.
- ❖ The notion of individual and collective rights as beneficial to each other – the individual welfare resides in the common welfare and common welfare resides in individual welfare.
- ❖ The ruler holds office as a trustee and has to exercise the rule of the constitution, himself not being above the law and be a role model who walks-the-talk.
- ❖ Vasudhaiva kutumbakam, globalization – the world is one family with the motivating rule ‘to do good to the whole world, i.e. service to uplift the physical, moral/spiritual and social uplift of all.
- ❖ Philanthropy through educational institutions, care homes for the needy, relief works in times of calamities.
- ❖ Several international conventions, namely - Human Rights, Rights to choose a spouse and found a family, Protection of dignity and privacy, Rights to a peaceful peace life, Rights to information, Equal rights for all, Equality before the law and justice, Rights of children and women, Equal opportunities, Gender & other bias free society, Good governance, good government, codes of conduct, Zero corruption, etc.
- ❖ Teach the masses to practice Yog (Yam-Niyam, etc.) and be in direct communion with the God, no need for intermediaries.

The Arya Samaj thus became, is and will always be the lighthouse to guide people to move from untruth towards truth, from the darkness of ignorance to the light of true knowledge, from immorality unto virtue ... to create a better society.

Arya Samaj is a force to

- Inculcate, nurture and enforce self-discipline
- continuously battle against evils
- instill the spirit of patriotism among the people
- establish peace in the world

Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, founder of the Banaras Hindu University wrote:

“If Arya Samaj keeps walking, society will remain standing,
 If Arya Samaj remains standing, society will sit down,
 If Arya Samaj sits down, society will sleep, and
 If Arya Samaj sleeps then the society will die. ”

Recap:

What is the Arya Samaj?

On April 10th, 1875 , the organization called "Arya Samaj" was formally registered in Bombay (Mumbai), India. Arya Samaj, as the name signifies, is a Samaj (Organization or Society) of Aryas (people who are noble). The word "Noble" may be defined as a person with the following characteristics: (1) Knowledge or Education; (2) Good Character; (3) Kindness; (4) Charitable; (5) Paying attention to duty; (6) Truthful; (7) Grateful; and (8) Non-violent. The Arya Samaj is a Society of such Noble People, who follow the teachings of the Vedas (the Word of God handed down to mankind in the beginning) and conduct themselves accordingly.

The Arya Samaj was founded by Maharshi Swami Dayananda Saraswati, a scholar who believed in the authority of the Vedas. The motto of the Arya Samaj, taken from the Vedas, is "Krinvanto Vishwam Aryam" (Rig Ved 9. 63. 5) - Make ALL men arya (noble and cultured). " Hence, by being a part of a Noble Society (Arya Samaj), you enjoin with a commitment of becoming an arya (noble person), who gathers in religious assemblies to propagate the teachings of the Vedas, so that you can ennoble (make noble) those who aren't noble - Making the Universe Noble.

What was the purpose of creating the Arya Samaj?

The society of the Arya Samaj was created in an effort to preserve the original values and beliefs of Hinduism as stated in the original scriptures of Hindus: The Vedas.

What are the views of the Arya Samaj?

Women

According to the Vedas, women of all races should be given an equal opportunity to education as men. At the time of the creation of the Arya Samaj, Hindu women were not allowed to study religious scriptures; they were not allowed to be priests or preach the word of God; they were denied access to education; they were treated as second class citizens below men; widows were treated as outcasts; they had to burn themselves on their husbands funeral pyre; their families were forced to produce a dowry

before a man's family accepted them into their family; and they were forced into child marriages with older men. The Arya Samaj fought against all of these injustices then and continues to champion the rights of women all over the world. Only Arya Samaj women are given the opportunity to become Hindu priests.

Society

The Arya Samaj believes that every individual shall be judged by his character and actions and not by his birth. Due to the unscrupulous manipulation of the caste system, those of high caste families were given honour and respect and those of low caste and their children were deemed "untouchables" and were ill-treated and suppressed. The Arya Samaj fought against these injustices against the untouchables and embraced them, educated them and welcomed them in their satsangs and religious gatherings.

Education

The Arya Samaj pioneers education for all. In India, many institutions of learning (schools, colleges, gurukuls) were created for men, women and children. The Arya Samaj is very vociferous in encouraging the common man to learn and read the scriptures. This society is against the practice of having only one selected group of individuals indulging in the reading and preaching from the scriptures.

Social Welfare

The Arya Samaj plays an active role in the welfare of the needy. Many orphanages, homes for abused women and widows and homes for the elderly have been established in India and other parts of the world. The society is also involved in providing relief during times of famine, drought, earthquakes and other natural disasters.

Politics

The Arya Samaj propagates patriotism and dedication to serving the interest of one's nation and motherland. In the times of the British Rule in India, the Arya Samaj was one of the foremost organisations to champion the cause for political freedom and independence.

Religion

The Arya Samaj propagates the motto "Back to the Vedas" and promotes these scriptures as the one true source of all knowledge. The Arya Samaj holds the Vedic principle of monotheism - that there is ONE GOD who is formless, ever-existent and all powerful. Due to the fact that God is all-powerful with many attributes he is referred to by many names such as Creator (Brahma), Preserver (Vishnu) and Dissolver (Rudra). For hundreds of centuries Hindu sects and scholars had accepted the Vedas as the original Hindu scriptures but due to passage of time and destruction of Hindu scriptures and the introduction of

other texts and interpretations, many deviations to the original teachings crept into Hinduism. The Arya Samaj promotes the Ved as the original scripture of all mankind and teaches that the acceptance of this will bring about a unity in the religious thinking of Hindus. The Vedas promote universal peace and its teachings are universal in character and apply to ALL people at ALL times.

The Arya Samaj rejects the belief of blind faith, animal sacrifices, idolatry, priestcraft and superstitions brought about by ignorance and fear. It promotes the philosophy of Karm (receiving the fruits of one's deeds). Suffering is the logical consequence of one's action (the law of cause and effect) and hence, superstitious belief does not eradicate suffering.

Is the Arya Samaj a religion?

The Arya Samaj is NOT a religion. It is a society that was formed, not as a new religion, but as a coming together of men and women of noble thoughts and actions who (irrespective of their social, ethnic or racial origins) believe in the underlying principles of Vaidik Satya Sanaatan Dharm (commonly called "Hinduism"). In simpler terms, the Arya Samaj is a society of virtuous persons that propagates selfless action for the development of humanity and congregates for the common purpose of preserving the pristine values of Hinduism.

As was said by Maharshi Swami Dayanand: "I have not come to preach a new dogma or religion, nor to establish a new religious order, nor to be proclaimed a new messiah or pontiff. I have only brought before the people, the light of Vedic Wisdom which has been hidden during the centuries of India's thralldom (slavery). "

12 - Arya Samaj leaders and their contributions

Arya Samaj has molded many great missionaries who were ready to do supreme sacrifice for the sake of Vedic Dharm. We will share the life and contributions of some of them here.

Swami Shraddhanand

Swami Shraddhanand was born at Talwan (Jalandhar) in 1856 in a well-known and well-to-do Khatri family. His father, Nanak Chand, was a policeman in the service of the East India Company. Swami was originally given the name of 'Brihaspati', but later, he was called Munshi Ram by his father. He did his early schooling in Varanasi and completed his education in Law in Lahore. Initially he practiced law at Phillaur and Jalandhar. Swami Dayanand Saraswati was reforming Bharat during that time by educating people about the true knowledge of the Vedas, through the Arya Samaj movement. Young Munshiram missed meeting Swami Dayanand Saraswati at Benaras (Varanasi) but later met him in Bareilly, when his father encouraged him to meet Swamiji. That was indeed a turning point in the life of Munshiram. After a long intellectual discourse with Swami Dayanand Saraswati there was a gradual change of heart in Munshiram. It was also a turning point in the religious and political history of India which was struggling for freedom from the British Empire. Mahatma Munshiram entered the Sannyas ashram in 1917 and took the name of Swami Shraddhanand. He went headlong into the freedom struggle and joined the Indian National Congress for a brief time. He led the protests and organized 'Hartals' (protests) in Delhi's Chandni Chowk area against the oppressive Rowlatt Act of the British Government. He motivated millions of men and women to join the struggle for independence of India from the British yoke.

He founded many institutions and established many Arya Samaj centers for the upliftment of the have-nots and the downtrodden. He was pragmatic in his approach and lamented that many political people only paid lip service to upliftment of the so-called Untouchables.

A thought came to his mind about establishing a Gurukul system of education and bring Vedic learning to its original glory. He got this approved by Arya Pratinidhi Sabha Punjab. He took a vow that unless he had collected a certain amount of money, he would not come back in his hometown and in a short time he was successful in his resolve. In 1902, the construction of this gurukul was started in Kaangadi a village near Haridwar. Initially a small institution, it eventually was granted a full university status in 1962 by University Grants Commission. Somewhere along the line, the British got suspicious of the seat of learning and since Mahatma Munshiraam Ji wanted no harm done to this institution he invited the Viceroy and Governor and made them aware of the truth that this was simply an institution of learning and had no politics intertwined in the system. Somewhere in this period, Munshiram Ji took Sannyas and became Swami Shraddhanand Ji. When Gandhi Ji was touring India after his service in South Africa, he went to visit Swami Shraddhanand Ji. Swami Ji greeted Gandhi Ji, and said "Mahatma, please sit down." Upon hearing this, Swami Ji was told by Gandhi Ji that "I am not the real Mahatma; you are."

He promoted education for girls. When he saw his own daughter, Ved Kumari, coming under the influence of Christianity while studying in a Christian Mission run school, he made up his mind to wean away children of his compatriots from the external influence by providing them good education in schools run by his singular contribution to the new Awakening in India by opening a chain of schools and colleges. These schools would make our young men and women proud of their Vedic Dharm, their culture and traditions and their country. The Dayanand Anglo-Vedic School (DAV School) was founded in 1886 in Lahore.

Swami Shraddhanand also believed in treating all Hindus and Muslims of India as equals. He believed in giving those who were forcefully converted a chance to return to the Hindu fold. Swami called this the 'Shuddhi Movement'.

While leading a march in Delhi, on March 30, 1919, in Chandni Chowk, the police were fully armed, pointing guns at Shraddhanand Ji, with the intention of shooting. But the commitment and glow on his face, and his fearless voice was so much that the police had no courage to fire at him. After the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, he was the first one who was able to arrange public meetings in such a difficult atmosphere. He wanted freedom for an undivided India. He wanted Hindus and the nation undivided and any talk of divisiveness such as in the lecture Maulana Muhammad Ali was very painful and unacceptable to him. He wanted the doors of Hindu Dharm wide open for unity and reconversion back to Hinduism. The upliftment of so-called untouchables was one of his priorities. All of these incidents led to hard core Muslims feeling uncomfortable. He was the only Hindu to address the gathering at the Jaama Masjid, Delhi invoking patriotism and he started by reciting Ved mantras and ending with 'Om Shanti Shanti Shanti'. While he was ill he was killed on December 23, 1926 by a Muslim extremist. This day is commemorated as Swami Shraddhanand Balidan Divas.

Dharmvir Pandit Lekhram, Arya Musafir



Pandit Lekhram was one of the most committed souls in Arya Samaj history. He was born in 1858 in a small village known as Sayyedpur district Jhelam (currently in Pakistan). His father was Mehta Tara Singh – a Brahmin. His childhood learning was in Farsi and Urdu – which were the two main regional languages

at that time. He became a sergeant in the police force. However, he was far more interested in religion and spirituality. He studied the Gita regularly. His superior, a Muslim inspector of police, was quite upset with him and told him that he could not work for his religion while serving in the government. He submitted his resignation, which showed his commitment towards his mission. Somewhere along the line, he studied the teachings of Munshi Kanhaiya Lal Alakhdhari, whose writings changed his thoughts. This was followed by his coming across the teachings of Swami Dayanand Saraswati.

Pandit Lekh Ram established an Arya Samaj in Peshawar. With an eager desire to learn more about Vedic Dharm, he went to meet Swami Dayanand in Ajmer. All curiosities were satisfied during that meeting and Lekh Ram ji dedicated his lifetime to Ved Prachar, publishing, lecturing, touring the different parts of North India. He did a lot of work to bring back people who had either already converted to Islam or those who were intending to convert.

After the demise of Swami ji in 1883, the Punjab Arya Pratinidhi Sabha decided to compile Swami ji's literature and documents about his life. None other than Pandit Lekh Ram ji was chosen to lead that task. He traveled and interviewed numerous persons who had many extensive interactions with Swami ji. Pandit Lekh Ram died at an early age in 1897 and that work was yet to be completed. The chief of Arya Pratinidhi Sabha Punjab asked Pandit Atma Ram Amritsari to complete the biographical book about Swami ji.

Married at the age of thirty-five, Pandit Lekh Ram had a son. One day, back home, his wife told him that his son was very sick. Hungry, Pandit Ji expressed his wish to first have dinner, thereafter bring his son to the doctor. While having dinner, he received a message that a large group of people were going to convert to Islam that very evening. He left for that place in the middle of his dinner and prevented the conversion. While there, he got a telegram that his only son had died. One of the chief qualities of Pandit Lekh Ram was that, wherever he was needed he went without caring about his own physical well being. He lectured, toured, and wrote extensively.

The following incident reveals his strong commitment. He came to know that one Hindu was converting to another religion in a village near Patiala. He ran and jumped onto a moving train to get to that village. The train did not stop at that village. He jumped out of the moving train. Despite his injuries, he pressed forward and achieved his goal of saving the Hindu man from converting.

On March 6, 1897 a fanatic stabbed him with a dagger, causing him to bleed. He was taken to the hospital but he did not survive. We bow down to this devoted human being who gave his life for the well-being and upliftment of humanity at large.

Pandit Gurudatt Vidyaarthee

From his life, one thing becomes very obvious: one does not necessarily need a long life to make a difference in this world. Hard work and perseverance were a couple of his utmost qualities. In a short

lifespan of twenty six years, what he did in the fields of acquiring knowledge, writing, uniting Hindus, and spreading Vedic knowledge is second to none.

Pandit ji was born on April 26, 1864 in Multan. After finishing high school, he went to college in Lahore. He became a member of Arya Samaj Multan in 1880. When the message reached Arya Samaj Lahore in 1883 that Swami ji was critically ill, this nineteen-year-old young man was sent to serve Swami ji in Ajmer. When he saw Swami ji live his last moments on that fateful evening of Deepawali, he had tears in his eyes when he saw that this great man was leaving this world with such peace and fearlessness. He resolved – then and there – that he would continue to spread the message of Arya Samaj for the rest of his life.

He became an integral part of the DAV system, traveled extensively all over Northern India to collect funds for it, lectured on Vedic Dharm, did tremendous social service, taught mathematics and science without salary in the DAV college. He had a full command of both Sanskrit and English.

He wrote extensively on different subjects including the Vedic system, philosophy, Upanishads, and teachings of Swami ji. He tried to explain words like “mitra” and “varun,” that these may mean oxygen and nitrogen and source of water and life. He did not hesitate to counter the criticisms of Christian missionaries. His lectures and teachings were well-liked almost universally.

He did not care at all about his own health. He apparently became very ill with tuberculosis and died on March 19, 1890. He had studied Satyaarth Prakash eighteen times. There were articles in several newspapers giving homage to the untimely death of this great soul. There is a lot to learn from his life and even if we follow his ideals just a little bit, Vedic Dharm will flourish and world will be a better place.

Lala Lajpat Rai

Lala Lajpat Rai was born to Munshi Radha Krishna Azad, a great scholar of Persian and Urdu, and his wife Gulab Devi, a strict religious lady on January 28, 1865, in Ferozpur, Punjab. His mother inculcated strong moral values in him. His family values allowed Lajpat Rai the freedom of having different faiths and beliefs .

In 1886, when his family shifted to Hissar, Lala Lajpat Rai started practicing law. It was here that he set up the Dayanand Anglo-Vedic school and turned into a follower of Dayanand Saraswati.

Lajpat Rai was not only a freedom fighter but a true patriot who strengthened the economy of his country. Showing concern for self-help and enterprise in India, Rai helped in founding the Punjab National Bank in 1895, which is still trusted as an excellent banking option by innumerable Indians.

While in America in 1917 he had founded the Indian Home Rule League in New York and a monthly journal Young India and Hindustan Information Services Association.

He was later one of the architects of the Swadeshi movement. Lala Lajpat Rai participated actively in the non-cooperation movement against British rule, which was started mainly to oppose the Rowlatt Act. For showing bravery in opposing this new legislation, in Punjab, Lala Lajpat Rai was given the title of 'Punjab Kesari' (the lion of Punjab).

Lajpat Rai was a heavyweight veteran leader of the Indian Nationalist movement, Indian freedom movement, Hindu Reform Movements and Arya Samaj, who inspired young men of his generation and kindled latent spirit of patriotism in their hearts with journalistic writings and lead-by-example activism. Young men, such as Chandrashekhar Azad and Bhagat Singh, were driven to sacrifice their lives for the freedom of their Motherland following Rai's example.

Lala Lajpat Rai was a prominent leader who played an important role in India's struggle for freedom. He was a prominent member of the famous 'Lal Bal Pal' firebrand trio during the independence movement.

On October 30, 1928, Lala Lajpat Rai led a peaceful procession to oppose the arrival of the Simon Commission in Lahore. Intercepting the march, Superintendent of Police, James A. Scott ordered his police force to 'lathi-charge' at the activists. The police targeted Lajpat Rai, in particular, and hit him on the chest. This action left Lala Lajpat Rai with severe injuries. He died of a heart attack on November 17, 1928.

Mahatma Hansraj

In older days, there were two camps in Arya Samaj. One believed in pure gurukul education while the other one believed in the integration of Vedic principles and practices along with modern day teachings. Swami Shraddhanand ji belonged to the gurukul camp, and Mahatma Hansraj belonged to the "modern" camp. Mahatma Hansraj ji was responsible for starting what we have today as the largest educational system – the DAV networks of schools and colleges, second only to India's government schools.

Mahatma Hansraj was born on April 19, 1864 in the village Bajvada district Hoshiyarpur Punjab. His father died when Hansraj was twelve. His older brother – Bhai Lala Mulkh Raj – was now breadwinner of the family. His older brother gave up his education and worked in the post office. With his meager salary of just 60 rupees per month, he put his younger brother through high school and college.

In 1877, while Swami ji was touring and lecturing in the state of Punjab, Hansraj ji became familiar with his teachings. When Hansraj ji was only in ninth grade, he challenged his Christian teacher when he criticized Vedic civilization. Hansraj ji was a contemporary of Lala Lajpat Rai and Pandit Gurudatt Vidyaarthee. Lala ji became a member of Arya Samaj Lahore and the editor in chief of the Arya Samaj newspaper. Upon the death of Swami ji in 1883, a meeting of Arya Samaj Lahore was called as a tribute to his life and legacy. It was decided that the best way to commemorate Swami ji's contribution was to set up a university where Hindi, Sanskrit, and Vedic teachings be taught along with modern education

including science and English. This institution was called Dayanand Anglo Vedic College – henceforth leading to the development of the DAV school system.

He worked for the development and maintenance of the DAV system without salary for his entire life. His elder brother shared half of his meager salary, which was enough to meet his and his family’s day-to-day needs.

There is one story that needs to be told about his honesty. One evening, he was sitting, writing something using a quill and ink (kalam & davaat). There was another kalam & davaat on the table which were rather ugly and old. A person came and told him that such a bad writing instrument was against the prestige of a principal. He replied, “The old one is mine, so I use it for my personal work. I cannot use the college material for my personal writing.” Such was the height of his character.

When his son Balraj was arrested by the British, he told him that if he truly was innocent, the government would free him. Mahatma ji provided service to victims of famine and earthquakes. When he was the chairperson of an Arya Samaj meeting in Delhi, he talked about the upliftment of untouchables, re-conversion to Hindu Dharm, and unity among Hindus.

Hansraj ji was a pillar of strength to the hopeless. His principalship of the DAV College in Lahore luckily placed him in a position where he could muster manpower and raise funds by making public appeals. Hansraj did this by leading the country from the darkness of ignorance to the enlightenment of knowledge.

He devoted his whole life serving the DAV institutions and also served as president of Arya Samaj Lahore and Arya Pratinidhi Sabha Punjab. Because of his services, sacrifice and simplicity people called him as Mahatma. Today, the largest non-governmental educational organization in the world is the chain of Dayanand Arya Vedic schools and colleges spread over the length and breadth of the country.

Lala Hansraj believed in furthering the cause of the Shuddhi Movement, that is bringing converttees back to the fold of Hinduism. In 1922, Hansraj ji’s comrades-in-arms succeeded in reconverting to the Vedic Dharm more than 2,500 kerala Hindus who had been forcibly made Muslims during the Mopla rebellion.

No wonder Lala Hansraj became Mahatma Hansraj in the eyes of both friends and foes. He continues to be revered many decades after his demise on November 15, 1938.

Mahatma Narayan Swami

Mahatma Narayan Swami was born on November 01, 1865 in Aligarh. His original name was Narayan Prasad. He got his primary education in Farsi and Arabic languages. Along with his primary education he self learned sanskrit and hindi.

When he was a student he got opportunity to see Swami Dayanand at Muradabad but due to his Pauranic Teachers he was not able to go to listen his lectures this he regretted his whole life. After the death of wife and son, instead of remarrying, he joined Arya Samaj. He joined Arya Pratinidhi Sabha Sanyukta Prant, Head of Gurukul Vrindavan, Sarvadeshik Sabha and First head of Arya Satyagrah, Hyderabad. When the 14th chapter of the Satyarth Prakash was banned in Sindh (now Pakistan), Mahatma Narayan Swami led a protest in Karachi to uplift the ban. In 1922 he took Sannyas Deeksha from Swami Sarwadanand ji and became well-known with the name of Mahatma Narayan Swami. He died a natural death on 18th October, 1986.

13 - Satyaarth Prakash - Introduction

'Satyaarth Prakash' (Light of Truth) is the Masterpiece of Swami Dayanand Saraswati, the founder of the Arya Samaj. It occupies a prominent place in the classical Religious and Philosophical literature of the world. It is regarded as the Bible of the Arya Samaj and is as immortal as the truth is.

It is in fact the beacon light leading people from darkness to light, irrationality to rationality, irreligion to religion, and nescience to science. It embodies the teachings of Swami Dayananda Saraswati on all matters – religious, social, educational, political and moral, also his beliefs and disbeliefs and the way of life as envisaged by the Vedas and the Vedic culture, which prevailed throughout the whole World till 5,000 years back, when enlightenment, peace and prosperity was at the Zenith of its glory.

It presents a charter of life at once sublime and noble. It contains the principles and rules of righteous conduct to all. In short it helps people mould and better their lives on the lines which were chalked out by the Vedas and the pattern laid down by what is the best in ancient Vedic heritage, whose living symbol was the Swami himself.

The object of the Maharshi in writing this volume, to quote his own words, is as under: -

".....there is not the remotest idea to hurt the feelings of any person either directly or indirectly; but on the contrary, the book proposes that men should distinguish truth from falsehood. Thus alone can the human race steadily advance on the path of happiness, since none but the preaching of truth is the cause of the improvement of the human family."

India is really a blessed land. Like the Vedas, Upanishads, Ramaayan and Mahaabhaarat, Geeta, the Satyaarth Prakash also had this land for its birth. Satyaarth Prakash is like the proverbial Nandini cow. It provides as much of milk of knowledge as desired. It is the condensed knowledge of Ved and Vedic culture. The greatness of Satyaarth Prakash lies in the fact that it prompts the reader to think independently and widens his scope of knowledge.

Satyaarth Prakash has two parts. The first half has 10 chapters. The second half has 4 chapters. The first half is exposition in nature. The second half is constructive criticism in nature. The chapters are called Samullaas meaning causing happiness by shedding Light.

Normally, a book would be having one preface in which the author seeks to explain the object of writing the book. Surprisingly, the Satyaarth Prakash has four introductions before the beginning of chapters 11, 12, 13 and 14, besides the introduction at the start of the book. It ends with a Statement of Beliefs and Disbeliefs by the author. It is always better to read the introduction and other introductions first before attempting to read the book as they enable the reader to understand the book better. The common refrain in all these introductions is that the author makes a passionate appeal to accept the truth and reject falsehood.

There are many special features about this book. Some of these are -

1. It is noted for its intense patriotism and rejection of foreign rule. This is first book which stressed the advantages of Self-Rule. No wonder, Lokamanya Tilak called Dayanand as the first person who first pronounced the word Swaraajya (Self-rule). It should be noted that while Dayanand called upon the people to fight for Swaraajya in 1874 it is almost 50 years later Congress appealed for Poorna Swaraj from Britishers.
2. It is the first book which uphold the Rights of Women and all others to study Vedas, supported by references from the Ved.
3. It is the first book to vehemently denounce the sacrifice of animals in Yajnyas. Several other acharyas had conceded allowing meat eating for ruling class [Kshatriyas]. But Dayanand opposed that, calling upon Kshatriyas to rule with courage and defend the country with all vigour and valor.
4. It sheds light on the definition of "Arya" misunderstood as a caste or race. Rather, it denotes nobility - noble in thoughts, speech and actions. It is the first book which exposed the myth of the Aryan expedition against India.
5. It exposes the evils of idolatry, superstitions, blind faith, Shraaddh or ceremony observed for the dead, pilgrimages, and the evil practices of looting people at the so called holy places, and other innumerable practices in the name of religion.
6. It exposes and condemns black magic, spirits, and astrology as a hoax which involves fraudulent methods supposedly to pacify inert planets, etc. It is an eye opener for those who strive to bring the scientific temper to the masses then and now.
7. It upholds the Vedic Varna Ashrama Dharm based on Guna- Karma –Swabhava, as opposed to inhuman birth-based Caste system.
8. It is first book which condemns anti Vedic books. It exposes the myth about the incarnation of God as a wrong interpretation of the Geeta and the telltale examples.
9. As alternative to the prevailing chaos, it highlights the Vedic system as unique, under which any country could become strong and valorous, and protect itself from enemy.
10. It urges every person, through the four Purusharths, to lead a virtuous life in seeking wealth, happiness, and to be compassionate, on the path to attain the Supreme Bliss called Moksh.
11. It is the first book which glorifies the household order [Grihasth Ashram] as the supporter of the other three Ashrams.
12. It refers to Lord Ram is a an ideal person (Maryaadaa Purushottam), Lord Krishna as an accomplished yogi with total self-control (Yogiraj), as men who never did even one wrong in their entire lives. This is the first book which shot down stories of Krishna being depicted as a seductor, etc.
13. It affirms that polytheism is not found in the Ved.
14. It calls upon all for self-introspection, more so among educationists.
15. It transforms an atheist to theist.
16. It is a manifesto that shapes the personality.

17. It is the yardstick that differentiates between true human beings and pretentious characters, a real Sannyasee and fake Sannyasee.
18. It is a manual of Vedic expositions of Nation, state polity and the art of real good governance.
19. It provides scientific explanation to the origin of universe and explain natural laws.
20. It has cleansed Vedic mantras of distorted and obscene meanings given either by ignorants or on purpose to demean the Vedas.
21. It expounds rationalism that rattles the people preaching falsehood.
22. It unfolds truth as truth, and as such is a guide to seekers of truth, and paints a truthful exposition of other faiths and sects (Quran, Bible, Purana, etc.), which remedied would enjoin them as truly humane.

But how is the Satyaarth Prakash relevant today?

1. It acts like the renowned Sudarshan Chakra for the defense of Vedic Dharm and Culture.
2. It is the encyclopedia of Dharm and a path finder for those who intend to know the intricacies of righteous living.
3. It is a compass for seekers of Moksh or eternal bliss.
4. It is a true guide for administrators, a directory of Vedic principles of freedom, equal rights, universal justice and brotherhood.
5. It lays bare the hollow 'modern' teachings about the Creation of the world and the Theory of Evolution.
6. It has changed the life of hundreds who understood and lived its teachings; the seeds of thinking start growing, leading to an obvious transformation: a dullard becomes a scholar, an atheist - a theist, the weak - strong, the arrogant - proud, the traitor - a patriot, the meat eater - a vegetarian, the butcher - a protector of animals, the absurd - logical, the prodigal - a judicious use of resources.

Many objectionable portions found in several books of religions were purged out after the Satyaarth Prakash was published.

As of today the Satyaarth Prakash has been translated into 23 languages and even Braille copy is also made available for the benefit of the visuallu impaired. It is estimated that around 400 books either in favor of or in opposition to the Satyaarth Prakash has been printed. As Satyaarth Prakash is getting read by more and more, the opponents would bite the dust eventually. Seth J. D Birla, a doyen among industrialists, has rightly remarked: 'while Satyaarth Prakash reflects the true Arya Sanaatan Dharm, it also removes the superstitions and frauds associated with religions.' It leads the reader to be more rational. It promotes the physical, moral/spiritual and social welfare of all. It carries no hatred against anybody.

14 - Festivals/Rituals and their significance

What are the festivals celebrated by Aryas?

The Arya Parva Paddhati details the festivals celebrated by Aryas:

- Nava Samvatsar & Arya Samaj Sthaapnaa Divas, New Year, day of Creation of the universe & foundation of the Arya Samaj.
- Shree RamNavamee, marks the birthday of Shree Rama.
- Holi or Vasantee Navasasyeshti, marks the spring harvest.
- Shraavane, is dedicated to the study of the Ved.
- Shree Krishna Janmaashtamee, marks the birthday of Shree Krishna.
- Vijayaa Dashamee, commemorates the victory of Shree Rama over Ravana
- Deepaavali or Sharadeeya Navasasyeshti & Rishi Nirvaan, marks the autumn harvest & demise of Maharshi Dayanand.
- Swami Shraddhanand Balidaan Divas, commemorating the martyrdom of the great stalwart.
- Makar Sankranti or Uttaraayana, marks an astronomical event, the Sun moves from the Southern to the Northern hemisphere.
- Vasant Panchamee, marks the fifth day of spring and is time to focus on the acquisition of knowledge.
- Seetaa Ashtamee, marks the birthday of Seetaa.
- Dayanand Dashamee, marks the birthday of Swami Dayanand.
- Rishi Bodh Utsav (Shivratri), marks the enlightenment of Swami Dayanand.

What are festivals?

Festivals are auspicious days. Festive celebrations prevail in all societies and communities. Most festivals across the world are periods of spiritual and religious fervor. They

- Have a very wholesome bearing on the individual and the society.
- Relieve us from the monotony of life.
- Create an environment of cultural harmony.
- Teach us to forego enmity and bond with one another in friendship.
- Are indeed times to share some time, food, sweets, clothing, etc. with the needy, to be compassionate towards others and to brighten their lives.

Moral, ethical, social values of life inevitably mix up with entertainment through festivals. However, in the name of festivals, resources, in particular money, should not be misused.

Why are some festivals related to seasons?

Both nature and the human body are made of the five elements: space, air, fire, water and earth. Nature teaches us magnanimity: the consistent brilliance/energy of the sun and the tranquility of the moon; the expansion potential of air; the purity of water; the tolerant and accommodating capacity of the earth, and the widespread space. Festivals marking the change of seasons prompt us to adapt to changes (food, clothing, daylight) to maintain physical, mental/moral/spiritual and social wellbeing.

There are 12 months and six seasons.

The twelve months are the lunar calendar months. Each month starts on the first day of the waning phase through the waxing phase and ends with full moon night. The waning phase of the moon starts with the regressing moonlight after full moon to the no-moon night. The waxing phase starts with the new moon progressing from the new moon.

The twelve lunar months are:

Chaitra (March-April)

Vaishaakh (April-May)

Jyeshth (May-June)

Aashaadh (June-July)

Shraavan (July-August)

Bhaadrapad (August-September)

Aashvin (September-October)

Kaartik (October-November)

Maargasheersh (November-December)

Paush (December-January)

Magh (January-February)

Phalgun (February-March)

The six seasons are:

- *Vasant* (Spring)
- *Greeshma* (Summer)
- *Varsha* (Monsoon)
- *Sharad* (Fall)
- *Hemant* (Pre-Winter)
- *Shishir* (Winter).

Why should we connect to history?

The life milestones of great men and women (eminent personalities) are honoured as these are moments to revisit their life stories; NOT as Eeshvar (God), BUT as Role Models, who walked-the-talk, who lived their lives as open books, and who will ever inspire generations to come.

Makar Sankranti

Most festivals in Hindu calendar are lunar festivals. Makar Sankranti is however a solar festival. Here is the brief description of significance of this festival.

The time which the earth takes to go around the sun is called the solar year. The circumference path in which the earth moves is called Krantivritta. This path has been virtually divided in 12 parts in astronomy. Each time the earth passes through this virtual joint or kraanti, is called Sankranti. These joints have been named so based on the constellation present in the sky at that time. The constellation appear to have shape resembling things known to the humanity. For 6 months, the days are smaller, the sun is considered to be moving towards the south pole as visible to us and then it appears to be progressively moving towards the north pole for the next 6 months. This apparent movement of the Sun on the north or the south side is called ayan. So, the sun is either Uttaraayan (moving northward) or dakshinaayan (moving southward). Out of the 12 joints or the sankranti, the most important is Makar Sankranti, since it is at this time that the sun appears to start moving towards north (uttaraayan). At some point in the history, this was apparently celebrated around Dec 22, but in last few thousand years, this date of movement has shifted from Dec. 22 to Jan. 14, and so the date continues to be Jan 14. The reason for all this change is because of the earth rotating on a tilted axis.

Around the time of this festival, the winter is still at its height. During this festival, people rejoice in different ways in different parts of India. Flying kites is one of the ways. In some places, it is celebrated as Lohri, which is celebrated by igniting bonfire and roasting various grains including sesame and jaggery. These grains are first offered as oblations to the fire during special Yajnyas before being consumed.

New Year Festival: Chaitra (around March/April), Shukla Paksha, Pratipada

According to the Indian philosophy, Creation of the universe took place on the first day of the bright (moon) half of the month of Chaitra (Vedic Calendar). That is why, most of the calendars of the Aryas begin from this date. For example, the Srishti Samvat (world era), Manvantaras such as Vaivasvata, the four Yugas, Vikram Samvat, all begin from the first day of the Shukla Paksha of Chaitra month (around March/April). Since the very beginning of creation, the Aryas have the tradition to celebrate the New Year with pomp and show.

Foundation Day of the Arya Samaj

(Chaitra Shukla Panchamee or Fifth Date of the bright half in the month of Chaitra)

It was on 10th April in 1875 that Maharshi Dayanand Saraswati, the great revolutionary, social reformer, reviver of our great Vedic culture founded the Arya Samaj in Bombay (now Mumbai). Although a number of reform movements started in the 19th century to reform the Indian religion and society. Arya Samaj was the most successful of them all in bringing about a renaissance in Hindu society.

Ram Navamee (Chaitra month, Navamee – ninth of the bright half of Chaitra)

This festival commemorates the birthday of Shri Ram Chandra (known as Maryada Purushottam (ie the ideal man carving the domains of conduct)).

Rakshaa Bandhan- the festival of Shraavane (Rishi Tarpan)

(Month of Shraavan - July/August)

This festival is celebrated on the Poornima (Full Moon) that is associated with Shraavan Nakshatra and, therefore, is called Shraavane. The month associated with the Shraavane Purnamasi is known as Shraavan. This festival is linked with the study of the Vedas and other sastras. During the rainy season, nearly all activities would come to a halt due to paths and fields being obstructed by rain water. That is why the sages, saints, preachers and ascetics used to observe Chaaturmaas, that is, they used to stay in villages or cities or a given place for four months and utilize that time to engage in spiritual, religious, scientific, Yogic discourses. This act of study used to begin on the Poornima (Full Moon) (the full moon) of the month of Shraavan and continued for four months, concluding in the month of Pausa.

During this period, in recognition to their contribution in the advancement of learning, food, shelter & clothing were offered to the sages. This practice was known as Rishi Tarpan. On this day, it is a common practice to change the sacred thread (Yajnyopaveet).

Presently, the ancient concept of studying scriptures has largely been lost due to new developments and changes in society. New traditions have come about. On this day, sisters tie the sacred thread (rakhi) on the wrist of their brothers. The tradition of tying a thread on the wrist of brave men by women came into fashion during the period of the Rajputs. When any woman made somebody her brother on the oath of a rakhi by sending the thread to him, and that person became duty-bound to protect that woman for her entire life.

Shri Krishna Janmashtamee (Bhaadrapad Month - August/September)

This festival commemorates the birth of Shri Krishna, the Yogeshvar (master of Yog). Lord Krishna was perfectly integrated with all positive human qualities. He possessed unparalleled wisdom, oration, patience, valor, courage, etc.

Vijayaa Dashamee (Dussehra) (Aashvin Month - September/October)

This festival is celebrated in India with great enthusiasm, and marks the victory of Shri Ram over Ravana, liberating Lanka from the evil rule.

From the ancient days, this festival has been the day of marking the beginning of preparations to launch campaigns of conquest. During the rainy season, roads were obstructed, resulting in a stoppage of travel and campaigns for conquest were also halted. This festival was celebrated in the autumn following the

rainy season. Rusted weapons were sharpened, armies were felicitated and campaigns for conquest were re-launched with the recitation of Shanti-karana and Swasti-vaachan mantras, after performing the Yajnya.

In current times, this tradition has lost its original purpose, as the same problems of transport no longer exist. Even then, this festival should be celebrated with enthusiasm to preserve the ancient cultural tradition and commemoration of the ideal conduct of Shri Ram, the Maryada Purushottam (the most ideal trend-setter) especially in the tough times of war.

Deepavali (October/November) Shaaradeeya Nava-Sasya-ishti: The Day of Maharshi Dayanand's Liberation

It is a popular belief among the people, that Maryada Purushottam Shri Ram Chandraji returned to Ayodhya after the conquest of Lanka on this day. To express their happiness, the people of Ayodhya lit lamps of ghee in their homes. Since then, the tradition of Deepavali has continued.

This festival is even older and related to the autumn harvest and the change of season. Our sages had initiated the festivals very wisely. In the Kausitaki Braahmana (5.1) it is reported that diseases attack and spread during changes of season, indeed a factual occurrence to date. Essential oils of medicinal herbs were, in the past and are in the present days disseminated/fumigated into the atmosphere through the process of Agnihotra. Hence, specific festivals mark the transition from one season to another during which people clean their homes and perform Agnihotra as a sanitization process. Ghee (Clarified Butter) and samagri (mixture of medicinal, fragrant, sweet wellness-promoting herbs appropriate to seasonal transitions) are used during Agnihotra to ward off disease causing bacteria, viruses and germs and purify the environment. The festival of Deepavali falls at the end of the rainy season, right at the beginning of autumn. In the rainy season, disease spreads rapidly due to persistent moisture everywhere. The performance of Yajnya and the lighting of ghee lamps within homes induces a slight rise in indoor temperature and lessens the moisture and cleans the environment. From Vedic times, the tradition has been to perform Yajnya on Poornima (Full Moon), Amaavasyaa (New Moon) and at the beginning of new harvests. Deepavali is on Amaavasyaa (New Moon) and new grains also come home, thus celebrated with great pomp and show.

The tradition of worshipping Lakshmi symbol of wealth and prosperity on Deepavali is also prevalent. The autumnal crop is symbol of prosperity, as food grains are the basis of life. Worshipping means to give the rightful place to the deserving ones. To place the new grains in the house with respect is the worship of Lakshmi. To light lamps of ghee on the occasion of prosperity is indicative of fortune. That is why on the day of Deepavali, parched grains are eaten and lamps are lit.

On the day of Deepavali, in Vikram era 1940, accordingly on October 30, 1883, Maharshi Dayanand, the foremost messenger of the new awakening, the first inspirer for India's freedom, propagator of patriotism and national integration, reviver of the Vedas, worshipper of Indian culture; savior of the

untouchables, orphans and widows, staunch advocate and follower of truth, hard critic of blind faith and hypocrisy, the worshipper of mankind and founder of the Arya Samaj, attained nirvana (liberated from the confines of this earth).

Mahavir Swami, the worshipper of non-violence and Swami Ramateertha, also received liberation on this Deepavali day.

Holi (Poornima - Full Moon, month of Phalguna - Feb/March)

This festival is celebrated in the month of Phalguna on the day of Full Moon. At this time, seeing the crops ripen, farmers rejoice, sing and dance joyously, as in the olden days. During the Vedic period, people expressed special gratitude on such happy occasions and performed Agnihotra in order to make first offering new grains as oblations and parched grains (Holaka) were consumed at the conclusion of the Yajnya. The common Hindi word 'Holi' is the adulterated form of 'Holaka'. Since the new grain was offered in the Yajnya, it was called 'nava sasya isti', meaning Yajnya of the new grain. Since the parched grain was called Holaka, this festival was called 'Holaka' + 'isti', as in the Yajnya of 'Holaka' or 'Holaka + utsava' ie the festival of 'Holaka'. The word Holi, which is now popular in referring to this festival, is the modified form of Holaka.

During the Vedic age, on the festival of Holi, every household used to perform Yajnya with the new grains, first in their homes and then collectively in the fields. Everybody used to bring new grains and ghee from their homes and offer oblations in the Yajnya. After doing so, they enjoyed organized programs of dance, songs and various kinds of plays. They used to give presents of scents and sprinkle rose water on one another. Forgiving and forgetting misunderstandings, people met neck to neck. They pledged to live lovingly, shedding all animosity. Indeed, Holi used to be a festival of joy and gaiety. But just as the revered Ganga River is polluted by dirty drains and rivulets on its journey from Gangotri to the ocean, the celebrations of Holi has been debased. Instead of Yajnya, substances like garbage, tyres, and wood are burnt causing pollution. The tradition of Agnihotra must be revived. Several other evil practices are now associated with this festival, such as misbehaving, consuming intoxicating substances (bhaang & liquor), throwing dirty water on each other, abusing and teasing women, and throwing colors mixed with chemicals on the face of others. Such degrading practices must be discontinued.

There is a popular legend in Indian mythology associated with this festival. It is stated that the cruel king Hiranyakashyap appointed his sister Holika to burn the king's religious and God-devoted son, Prahlad. Hiranyakasipu thought that his sister Holika would come out of the pyre after burning Prahlad by her devilish power. However, by the grace of God, Prahlad survived and Holika was burnt. From that day, the festival of Holi was initiated. It is difficult to comment about the veracity of this event as it fails through the tests of the logic. Nevertheless, this legend teaches us to follow the truth with firm conviction and not to deviate from the path of truth, even in the face of calamity and opposition from family members.