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V DAT CURRICULUM PART 1

BASIC TEACHINGS OF HINDUISM

"Avidyaya Mrityum Tirtva Vidyaya Amritam Ashnute"

YAJUR VEDA - 40:14

**With worldly knowledge, a man can overcome hardships and sufferings.
But with Spiritual knowledge he can reach immortality (moksha)**

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May we look at all with a friendly eye

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Please report any corrections and suggestions for this document to vdat@aryasamaj.com

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CHAPTER 1

WHAT IS DHARM (RELIGION)?

Difference between Man and Animal

What is the difference between the two?

Our Shastras say that in terms of the habits of eating-drinking, sleeping-awakening, defending-attacking and procreating, both man and animal are the same. The factor that separates man from animal is the freedom he enjoys in choosing his action and the ability he has in upholding moral and religious values; it is in having these natures he is raised to a higher plane. Without religion man is like an animal.

But what is religion?

Man can become good. He can improve himself. Animals do not have the ability to do this. They will always remain as they are, while man can leap ahead. Man's desire to be good is the basis of religion. To become good, to raise himself above the animal level, man has to develop the good qualities which are within him. He will have to learn and practice virtues such as truth, compassion, love, tolerance, forgiveness, contentment, discipline and purity.

When one animal meets another it growls, it prepares to pounce on the other, this is animal nature. Man, on the other hand, helps his fellow being. He tries to lessen his suffering. He loves his neighbor. These virtues differentiate man from animal and they make up part of religion.

Aspects of Religion

Good qualities or virtues form one aspect of religion. To understand religion fully we must learn about the three different aspects that constitute it. They are:

1. Belief in God, or faith in a Divine Power;
2. Performing rituals, or worship and prayer;
3. Practicing ethics and morals, or virtues.

We shall examine these in some detail.

1. Belief in God

There is a divine power, which controls the actions of the world. We call Him, Parameshwar (God). Belief in God is an important part of religion. Who is God; what is His form and how could He be found are revealed to us by religion. God made this world. We were born in it. Religion explains what happens after death. Faith in God is the first important part of religion.

2. Performing Rituals and Ceremonies

We can understand God and discover Him through the medium of ceremonies. At these events, we sing the praise of God. We worship Him. Temples, prayer houses and other holy places are erected for conducting religious ceremonies. These are performed according to rites and rules. We have rites for marriages, celebrating births, and handling deaths etc. Ceremonies have a great influence on the lives of

people. With their help, humanity is encouraged to walk on the straight and virtuous path. Rituals, worship and prayer, therefore, make up the second important part of religion.

3. Practicing Ethics and Morals

To become a good man, an individual will have to learn and practice virtues such as compassion, truthfulness, non-violence, justice, forgiveness, contentment, tolerance, discipline, purity, etc. Greed, envy, enmity, pride and other evil traits must be eschewed. The need for man to be honest and good is just as important as is his belief in the worship of God. In his relationship with people it is important that he manifests his better qualities. Without them all his ceremonies, prayers and worship will be meaningless. Ethics and morals, thus, make up the third important part of religion.

These three aspects form the body of religion. We should know them and thoroughly practicing becoming good. Only then will we raise ourselves from the animal plane to one of human and through it that of peace and happiness.

Religion and the World-hereafter

Material and Spiritual Progress:

Religion is not just associated with the present life, but also with the life after death. Death does not bring an end to life. Life is a continuous stream, which existed before and goes on even after death. The combination of body and soul produces what is called life which, though revealed in this life, was also manifested before and will be in the future. The soul is deathless (eternal). But the wheel of birth and death moves on ceaselessly.

What sets this wheel in motion and directs it, is religion. In other words, our actions, good and evil, revolve the wheel of life. With the destruction of the body all ties with the world come to an end. All relationships of father/mother, husband/wife, parent/children, friend and companion, cease to exist. All material wealth, property, cars, etc. are left behind (at death). But the good and the bad actions performed maintain their association with the soul. It is these actions which fashion our future lives. The Manusmriti 8-17 states:

Eka eva suhrid dharmo nidhane pyanuyaati yah

Shareerena samam naasham sarvamnyaddhi gatchhati.

‘That religion (Dharm) is the one, true company which remains at your side even after death. Everything else is left behind with the destruction of the body’. In this way religion is related not only to the present life but life hereafter. Confirming this idea in the Vaisheshika Darshan, Seer Kanaad has given a definition of Dharm (religion) thus:

Yato Abhyuday Nihshreyas siddhih sa Dharmh – Dharm is that by which advancement is attained in this world as well as in the world-hereafter. In this definition emphasis is placed on both aspects – progress of life in this world and spiritual advancement after death. To withdraw from active life in premeditation on the life-hereafter is just as inadequate as it is to be steeped in sensual pleasures without any thought of the world beyond.

At present, we are beings of this world, and born in this world. We must take an interest in the joys and sorrows, prosperity and adversity, ups and downs experienced here. Even here thought should not be given only to the individual’s benefit, but also to the prosperity of society. Society is plagued by

ignorance, famine, epidemics, diseases, murder and war and the world is faced with national, political and economic problems. One should not run away from such problems; religion does not prescribe this; it prescribes rather that we should accept them as challenges, and find ways to solve them, to improve life and make the world a happy place. The chief aim is to make the world prosperous. In other words, work towards the physical, spiritual and social upliftment of mankind. 'The chief objective to society is to do good to the world i.e. to make physical, spiritual and social improvement' (the sixth principle of the Arya Samaj).

At the same time man must take cognizance of the fact that he should not become enmeshed in the sensual enjoyments of the world, nor should he be submerged in worldliness. While engaged in action in this world, man should, at the same time, be mindful of the other world; his gaze should be turned towards spiritual advancement; the purpose of which is God-realization. It must always be remembered that we must progress from generation to generation on this path. Religion thus points to the direction of progress, both here and in the world beyond.

Religion and Science:

The basis of religion is spiritual power while that of science is matter. But it must be understood that religion and science are not opposed to each other. Science attempts to gain an insight into physical forces and reach the truth. Whatever truth is discovered through investigation and research is accepted as scientific truth and the rest is discarded.

The path of religion is also the search for the truth, and therefore it is not opposed to science. To do good for the benefit of mankind is the dominant aim of religion and science can be an important aid in this endeavor. To face famine, drought, diseases, epidemics, earthquakes, poverty etc. religious beliefs cannot help us as much as the knowledge of science and scientific discoveries.

The truths discovered based on scientific facts must be accepted. It is possible that, on this account, old religious beliefs and blind devotion may be shaken; that what was considered truth in accepted scriptures is proved incorrect-whether the earth is round or flat, whether the earth revolved round the sun or vice versa, the causes of solar and lunar eclipse, why small-pox and other diseases break out and how they can be eradicated. All these have been clarified by science. Are we going to accept these based on scientific facts or on the foundation of our ancient, incomplete, religious faith? For we must always be prepared to accept truth and abandon untruth. 'We should be ever ready to accept truth and renounce untruth' (the fourth principle of Arya Samaj).

Physical science is unable to reach the realm of the spirit, and the scientist can only admit that he has yet not discovered the basic reality. From this point of view religion and science are complementary and not in opposition to each other.

Many Names of Hinduism

1. Hindu Dharm

In present days, our religion is called Hindu Dharm. It is known by this name throughout the world. The word, Hindu, comes from the name, Sindhu. Sindhu is a big river in the western part of ancient Bharat (India), which is now in Pakistan. The British called the river, Indus. From this word, we got the modern name 'India' for the ancient Bharat. When foreigners arrived in India during the early

days they referred to those who lived on the banks of the Sindhu and the adjoining land as, Indus. This name, later become Hindu. (explained in more details in Chapter 2)

2. Vedic Dharm

The real, authentic name of our religion is Vedic Dharm. In ancient days, it was called just Dharm. Our religion has its roots in the Vedas, which are our original scriptures. Hinduism has expanded on their teachings. That is why it is known as the Vedic Dharm.

3. Sanaatan Dharm

Another name for our religion is, Sanaatan Dharm. The word, Sanaatan, means: eternal; that which exists forever. The Hindu-Vedic-Vedic religion is the oldest religion in the world. It is difficult to say exactly how old it is, because our religion has existed since man began to evolve. It will continue to exist in the future as well. That is why our religion is called, Sanaatan Dharm (Eternal Religion). We should try to understand our religion. Its teachings will help us live better lives.

QUESTONS FOR REVIEW

- 1) What do man and animal have in common? Why is man a higher being?
- 2) Explain the three aspects of religion.
- 3) How many names does our religion have, and how were they formed?
- 4) What is the oldest authentic name of our religion?
- 5) Write brief notes (3 to 4 lines) on the following?
 - a. Religious ceremonies.
 - b. The name, Hindu
 - c. The name, Vedic Dharm
- 6) Fill the blanks in the following sentences with appropriate words:
 - a. The factor that separates man from animal is found in his _____.
 - b. If man is not _____ and _____ his prayer and worship are useless.
 - c. Hindu-Vedic Dharm is also referred to as _____, because its source is in the _____.
 - d. The Divine Power which controls the world is _____.
 - e. _____ is the oldest religion in the world.

Remember these words:

Dharm → Religion

Shaastra → Scripture, Religious Book

Sanaatan → Eternal, Old.

CHAPTER 2

Hindu Religion and Hindu Society

The Name Hindu

Among all the religions of the world, Hinduism is the most ancient. It is difficult to determine exactly when it originated, as it is not based on the teachings of any particular sage or prophet. Its origin goes back to the time when man first became aware of the need for a way of life. It was much later in history that this religion was termed Hinduism. Initially, this religious code of conduct was called Dharm, or ethics, and it was regarded as the religion of mankind. Later, when the teachings of various saints and sages gave rise to many religious sects, a name had to be found that would unify the different beliefs.

'Hindu' has been derived from the name 'Sindhu'. Sindhu is a well-known river in the north-west of India. The foreigners referred to this river as Hindu or Indu. The Persians pronounced the 's' sound as 'h'. It resulted in the name Hindu being given to the people living on the banks of the River Sindhu. It is quite logical to see how the term Hindu was used to refer to the religion of these people. Today Hinduism denotes the religion of a particular group of people.

In the West, the River Sindhu is known as Indus. The name India itself is derived from 'Indus'. Sir Radhakrishnan writes in the 'Hindu View of Life' (Page 13): *"The Hindu civilization is so called, since its original founders or earliest followers occupied the territory drained by the Sindhu (the Indus) river system corresponding to the North-West Frontier Province and the Punjab. The people on the Indian side of the Sindhu were called Hindu by the Persian and the later western invaders. The term 'Hindu' had originally a territorial and not a creedal significance"*.

Hindu Society (Hindu-Arya)

Today the followers of Hinduism are called Hindus. At first the people living on the banks of the Sindhu were called Hindus, but later the name applied to the entire population of India. The Hindus constitute a very large and complex society. In it there has been an integration of many races. In reality, these races were offshoots of the one human race, but on account of geographical and environmental conditions, prevailing in the different parts of the world, separate races came to exist.

In ancient India the Aryas in the North and the Dravidians in the South, were two important population groups. The word 'Arya' has its origin in the Sanskrit language. It means a pure, noble, righteous and progressive person. In the course of time this name became associated with the people living in the region of Sapta-Sindhu. This was the land of the seven rivers that comprised the Sindhu and its tributaries. The area covered today by Kashmir, Afghanistan, Punjab, Sindh, Himachal Pradesh and other surrounding territories were commonly known as Sapta-Sindhu. The Aryas were the original inhabitants of the Sapta-Sindhu. Later, the Aryas spread not only to the various parts of India, but also to Iran, the Middle-East and several European countries.

Some historians are of the opinion that the Aryas migrated from elsewhere and settled in India. There are differences of opinion about the place of origin of the Aryas. But in reality, the truth is not far to seek. In fact, India has been the ancient home of the Aryas, but during a later period in history, they migrated to other lands as well.

In Indian literature, there is no evidence to support the view that the Aryas migrated to India from some other country. All peoples of the world are proud of the land of their forefathers, and it is in literature that the life of a nation is recorded in one form or another.

If the assertion that the Aryas migrated to India from elsewhere, were true then there ought to have been allusions, or direct evidence, supporting this fact in the literature of a people as civilized as the Aryas. On the contrary, there is abundant proof in Indian literature that the ancient abode of the Aryas was the Sapta-Sindhu.

From early times of Indian history, the population of India comprised the Aryas, Dravidians, Kols, Nages, Vanars, Kirats, Mundas and other smaller groups. They differed in their customs and traditions on account of geographical, historical and environmental factors but from north to south and east to west of India there prevailed only one religion, one culture and one civilization among them. The admixture of all these various races makes the great Hindu society.

In the long history of India many reformers took birth in Hindu society periodically. They discovered evils and malpractices in Hindu society and religion and endeavored to eliminate them. These reformers were Hindus and their teachings were in reality, the essentials of Hinduism. As time went on, their cults also degenerated and there arose from them many new sects. The most prominent amongst the reformers are Gautama Buddha, Vardhaman Mahavir and Guru Nanak. Their followers are known as Buddhist, Jain and Sikhs respectively but they are also organs of the large Hindu Society.

In this way during thousands of years the vast Hindu society was established. Despite differences in ideas, beliefs, languages and customs there was just one society. Religion, culture and civilization wove them into a unity.

Hindus, in whichever state they may be living in India - whether in Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Assam, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Kashmir or any other state - are one people. Whether they are inhabitants of India, England, Mauritius, Fiji, Suriname, Guyana, West Indies or Africa they are all Hindus. Similarly, whether they speak Hindi, Bengali, Tamil, Telugu, Marathi, Gujarati, Punjabi or any other language, they are all Hindus. By changing a place or a language or the mode of living one does not cease to be a Hindu. Hindus should always be proud of their religion. They should learn and understand their religion and impart its teachings to their children.

Spread of Hinduism

A study of history reveals that Hinduism did not exist only in India. In ancient times, it had spread to distant lands. Prior to the birth of Christianity and Islam, Hinduism was practiced in countries lying in the north of Asia, on the northern side of the Himalayas as well as in the south-east Asia, besides India.

Even today in the excavations are discovered evidence of Hindu religion. During the reign of Buddha and Asoka, Buddhism was propagated by missionaries from Japan to Central Eastern Asia. There are still to be found idols of Buddhas in these countries. Stories from the Raamaayan and the Mahaabhaarat are known to people of South Eastern Asian countries e.g. Burma, Malaya, Java, Sumatra, Bali, Borneo, Siam (Thailand), Cambodia (Vietnam). There, the names of village and persons bear close similarity to Hindu names. The idols – images – statues – of Raam, Krishna, Shiv and others are still to be found there. In their feasts and festivals there are traces of Hindu traditions and customs. For a thousand years from 300 B.C. to 700 A.D. Hinduism held sway in these countries.

Today we find Hindus settled in various parts of the world. Amongst the important countries are England, Mauritius, Fiji, Suriname, Guyana, Trinidad, Burma, Ceylon, Thailand, Singapore, the USA and Canada. They are also to be found in certain parts of Africa and America. Indians in these areas profess and practice the Hindu religion and culture. People from European and American countries are, in fact, showing greater and keener interest in Hinduism today and are gradually coming under its influence.

In ancient times the propagators of knowledge, art, religion and philosophy were the Hindus. At that time India had assumed the exalted position of world teacher.

Lord Manu in his great work, the 'Manusmriti' states in Chapter 2, shlok 20, "People from different countries received knowledge from India and thereby advanced themselves'.

For the purpose of this book/exam, we will always put the word Vedic, with Hindu, to draw attention of the readers towards the real/authentic name of the Hindu Dharm, i.e. Vedic.

CHAPTER 3

GOD

God's characteristics and attributes

We believe in a divine conscious power which is superior to man. This divine power is called Ishwar , Parameshwar, Parmaatmaa, Brahmaa, Om (Om) and by many other names in the Hindus Scriptures. This Parameshwar (God) creates the universe, preserves it and also dissolves it.

God is omniscient: He is all knowing. There is nothing in the universe that He does not know. He also knows the thoughts in the innermost depths of our minds; He is therefore all knowing. He knows what has happened, what is happening, or what will happen. The past, present and future are the same to Him and nothing thereof is unknown to Him.

God is omnipresent: He is present in all things. There is no place where He is not found. He is in the tiniest of tiny atoms and in the largest of large things. He is the closest of the things that are close to us and farthest of the things that are far away.

God is omnipotent: He is all powerful. He can do everything without the assistance of anyone. There is no one more powerful or greater than He, nor is there anyone equal to Him.

God is eternal: There was no time when God did not exist. Consequently, He did not have a beginning and is therefore, said to be anadi (without beginning). Similarly, He will ever exist because He has no end and is therefore called ananta. God is beyond place and time.

Our Shastras in describing God say:

God is all pervading, lustrous, bodiless, flawless, pure, free of sins, all knowing, existing in all, transcendental, ever-living and self-proven. (Yajur veda 40.8)

God is all-pervading and all-powerful, therefore, He does not need hands, legs, eyes, ears and other organs like ours.

The Upanishads say:

God has no hands but He grasps all; He has no feet but He is very quick; He has no eyes but sees all things; He has no ears but He hears the talk of all; He has no internal organs but He knows the whole universe; there is no one who might know the whole of Him: Him they call eternal, most excellent and all pervading Purush.

(Shvetashvetar Upanishad 111-19)

Conversely, we can say that God has numerous eyes, ears and other organs all around Him for the Bhagavad Gita says:

It (Brahman) has its hands and feet on all sides. Its eyes, heads, faces and ears are on all sides in this world. It remains (over and above) after having pervaded all. (Gita 13.13)

One God and His Many Names

The Hindu Dharm believes in One God. Only one God has been worshipped according to our ancient scriptures. There is only one God but He has many names. He is called by His many names because of His various functions and attributes. Thus we call Him Agni, Yam, Shiv, Rudra, Vishnu, Brahmaa and by other names. However these are not separate beings (devs). These have neither separate forms, nor separate entities or separate places of abode.

Our Shastras say;

'Ekam Sat vipraah bahudha vadanti, agnim yamam matarishwanmahuh (Rig veda 1-164-46)

This translated means: God is one but wise men call Him by various names as Agni, Yam, Matarishva etc.

Tadevgni stad Aaditya stadvayu stadu chandramaah (Yajur veda 31-1)

God is Agni, He is Aaditya, He is Vayu, He is Chandramaa (moon). God is Brahmaa, He is Vishnu, He is Rudra, He is Shiv, He is Akshar.

(Kaivalya Upanishad)

We have evidence of persons around us being called by many names. During the time of the Mahaabhaarat Shri Krishna was just one person but he was called by many names because he possessed many virtues and performed many deeds. He was called Yadav because he was born in the Yadu dynasty; Murlidhar because he played on the murli (flute); Madhusoodan because he killed a raakshas known as Madhu; Gopaal because he reared cows or one who kept his organs under control Vaasudev because he was the son of Vasudev and so on.

Similarly, Arjun, too, had many names because of his many qualities and accomplishments although in the Mahaabhaarat there was just one Arjun. He was referred to as Kaunteya-Kunti's son; Paartha-Pritha's (Kunti's) son; Dhananjay-winner and brings of wealth; Gudaakesh-one who has control over his sleep; Paandav-son of Pandu; Bharat-born in the Bharata dynasty.

Likewise God is one but He is known by many names because of His many attributes and functions.

Meanings of some of the thousands of names given to God are given below:

Ishwar – powerful or Lord of the universe, world.

Parameshwar – most powerful.

Atma – dweller in all; present in all.

Parmaatmaa – the one who is present even in the most subtle substance.

Note: *The Jeev (soul) is also called Aatma because it resides in the body. Thus to differentiate God and soul both of which dwell in our body God is referred to as Parmaatmaa.*

Prabhu – The Lord of all beings or the one that is capable of doing all things.

Brahm – The one existing throughout the universe or who is majestic. To show three kinds of powers of the one God we call Him Brahmaa, Vishnu and Rudra (Mahesh).

Brahmaa – The one who is the greatest and creates the universe.

Vishnu – The one who pervades everything and preserves all.

Rudra – Who makes evil persons cry and destroys the evil doers.

Mahesh – The greatest of the great.

Shiv – Who does good to all.

Shankars – Who gives peace to all and does good to all.

Ganesh – Ganpati – Lord of all things; leader of all beings.

Mahadev – One who is most brilliant.

Yam – One who keeps the whole world under control and gives life and causes death.

Narayan – One whose presence is felt in man and also in water.

Laxmi – One who makes all things and gives them form.

Sarasvati – One who has full knowledge of all things.

Mata – One who makes all things.

Pita – One who provides and protects.

Agni – One who is the brightest, reaches all places.

Savita – One who creates the whole world.

The Elephant and Six Blind Men

God is one but as He has many attributes and many functions, He is called by many names. How is it that the one God has many names? Given below is a story, which illustrates this.

In a village, an elephant was seen for the first time. All people turned out to see the animal. They were astounded to see such a huge beast as they had never seen any being of such a size before.

In the village lived six blind men. They heard about the strange animal. Like the others they wanted to know what kind of animal it was. They also went to the elephant and began to feel its body to know its appearance.

One, placing his hand on the elephant's back exclaimed, "the elephant is like a wall". Another disagreed, "no, the animal is like a pillar"; since he was holding the animal's legs. The third man interrupted, "what nonsense are you speaking? The animal is like a winnowing fan". He was holding the elephant's ear.

"You are a fool", shouted another, "can't you see, the elephant looks like a thick rope". This man had the elephant's tail in his hand. Hearing all this, the fifth man cried out in excitement, "how wrong you all are. The elephant is like a pestle. See how hard it is." He was feeling the elephant's tusks. Now the sixth man could not remain silent, "You are all liars", he hinted, "the elephant is really a hosepipe." He was running his hand over the trunk of the animal.

Thus, the six blind men considered one another wrong and began to quarrel. Thereupon came a person with keen sight and addressed them in the following manner: "Brothers, you are quarreling in vain. What each of you say is correct, but only partly". Having spoken thus he took them around the elephant and gave them an idea of the whole animal. They then realized the truth.

In the same way, we meditate upon certain names of God and consider our point of view as the only truth. We think the ideas of other people are false. But as soon as we understand the truth that God has many qualities and functions, we realize that though possessing numerous names, He is still one.

1. Om

Of all the names of God Om is the supreme. Om is the most comprehensive name of God. Other names denote only some one aspect. That is the reason why Om signifies only God and nothing else whereas other names stand for other things as well.

The word OM is made up of three letters. Namely A, U and M. These three letters express the three great attributes of GOD.

A denotes the power of God to create the Universe.

U denotes the power of God to preserve the Universe.

M denotes the power of God to dissolve the universe.

The word 'OM' also has two special meanings. It means "Omni-present" and "Protector". God is present in every particle of the atom and there is not a place imaginable where His presence is not to be found. Being Omnipresent He is protecting this universe through His power, knowledge and His laws. God is also the Protector of His devotees.

2. Dev

Another name for God is Dev. This word has been given many meanings in Sanskrit literature; like shining, happiness, movement, praise, play, victory.

God has all these attributes therefore He is called Dev.

Yaska Muni has written in the Nirukta –

Devo Danadva deepanadva dyotanadva

Dyusthano bhavatiti va (Nirukta 7-15)

Those who give charity; those who shine; those who enlighten others and those existing in space are all called Devs.

The sun, moon, stars, fire, etc also shine, therefore, these are also referred to as Dev. They however are not God as they are inanimate and have no life.

Learned persons are called Devs in the 'Shatapath Braahman' and mother, father, guru (teacher), and atithi (guest are called Devs in the Upanishads because they do good to the world and are worthy of our respect.

3. Bhagavaan

God is called Bhagavaan because He is possessed of entire glory and is the object of adoration.

Bhaga means prosperity, wealth, to serve, to praise. Therefore, one who is wealthy, mighty, or worthy of reverence is called Bhagavaan. Panini who was a great Sanskrit grammarian was called Bhagavaan Panini. The founder of the Magadh Empire, Chanakya is also called Bhagavaan Chanakya. Similarly, great persons who become mighty, powerful or influential are referred to as Bhagavaan. However, this does not mean that they are God.

The sun, fire, water etc are also called Devtaa or Bhagavaan in our literature. This does not mean that these elements have any extra-ordinary power or qualities. We can derive benefit from these maximum benefit from them. The rays, light and heat of the sun give us life. Without the sun, life would cease. Similarly, vegetables and grains are grown with the supply of water and we thus obtain food for our sustenance. With this natural power (water) we produce electricity. Therefore these elements are called Dev or Bhagavaan in spite of the fact that they are material things. These cannot help or harm any one of their own accord. Nevertheless, one can suffer harm or derive gain from them by using them to good advantage. It is left to man to use these natural forces for his benefit.

God – his knowledge and realization

It is through our sensory organs that we are able to obtain knowledge of worldly things. These organs are our eyes, ears, nose, tongue and the skin. Through these organs we are able to see, hear, smell, taste and feel worldly objects and get to know their shape, form, taste and smell. But God is not a thing of which we can learn through our sensory organs therefore it is difficult to know about God.

There are many things in this world whose existence cannot be verified by our organs. There are many things we come to know of by deduction after reasoning with our mind and intellect. Our sensory organs are limited in their power. We cannot see all things with our eyes. For example, tiny and microscopic things and those beyond a certain distance cannot be seen by the naked eye. This does not mean that these microscopic things and those beyond our range of vision do not exist. With the aid of a microscope or a telescope we can, however, see very tiny objects and objects that are very far away from us. Nevertheless, these instruments, too, have their limitations. As the eye has its limitations so the rest of the sensory organs also have their limited powers.

Our sensory organs cannot help us to know God. The Upanishads say that our organs cannot help us to know about the Atma that is present in all things. We can know Him with our inner sight.

(Katha Upanishad 1.3.12)

To know God, it is necessary to possess spiritual knowledge. We could experience Him with knowledge, devotion and meditation. With the guidance and training of a guru (teacher) we can attain him. Just as it takes much effort to know of worldly matters and many years of study to become a graduate, similarly, it requires concerted effort in the right direction to reach God.

QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

1. What are the 3 main attributes of God? Explain their meanings.
2. What do you understand by: "Without beginning, eternal, formless?"
3. Why should I not fear to do truthful actions?
4. There is one and only one God, known by various names True _____ False _____
5. Fill in the blank spaces with words from the given list:

(All-pervading, all-knowing, changeless, unborn, attributes, functions, hearts).

God knows everything; therefore, we regard Him as _____. He is _____ because He is everywhere. Since God does not take birth He is _____. God does not change; therefore, He is _____. God dwells in the _____ of all beings. God has many names because of His _____ and _____.

6. What did the blind men think the following parts of the elephant's body were:

Foot	Trunk	Back
.....		
Tail	Ear	Tusk
.....?		

7. How did they learn the truth about the animal?
8. Remember the words:
The following names are generally used for God in Hinduism:
Parameshwar
Parmaatmaa or Paraamtman
Ishwar, Prabhu
Om
Brahm
Brahmaa
Bhagwaan

CHAPTER 4

Three Eternal Entities God, Soul and Matter

Inanimate and Animate

All that we see around us can be distinctly divided into two categories namely: Those that are inanimate (lifeless) and those that are animate (have life).

1. Inanimate object cannot think and do anything on their own. They cannot even move on their own accord because they have no life, for example, land, stone, iron, water, etc. They are composed of matter.

2. Animate object are those that have consciousness, work on their own accord and move about on their own impulse. They have the capacity to make use of the inanimate objects. The essential factor is that these must have life, for example, man, animals, birds etc.

Three Entities (objects):

Those entities that have consciousness fall into two categories. In the first category, we have that power which is present all over, which is perfect in itself, is all-knowing and is all powerful. This power does its work on its own and without the need of any-body's help. This great power is called God.

The second category where consciousness is present is found in bodies that have life. Its knowledge, strength and power of action are limited and thus it is not capable of achieving perfection in everything. This consciousness is called Soul (Jeev).

We thus have three eternal entities in this world:

1. Matter
2. Soul
3. God.

Matter, Soul and God

1. Matter

Inanimate object like a palace, and a mountain break up. The broken pieces break further until they crumble to tiny bits.

Finally they separate into atoms which are microscopic and cannot be seen with the naked eye. This universe is formed by the cohesion of atoms. The gross state of the atoms is called matter (Prakriti). Matter in inanimate. It cannot think for itself, nor do any thing by itself, nor does it have the capacity – power to desire anything. Objects made of this matter, too, cannot do anything on their own. They undergo changes as a result of the effect of cold, heat, rain, water, etc, but they cannot change on their own accord. Articles made of matter do not experience pleasure and pain, and do not derive the pleasure obtained by eating, drinking, seeing, hearing and feeling.

The whole universe is made of matter. Things made of matter have five substances which are called five Mahabhoot or five tattva.

They are: 1) Earth 2) Water 3) Fire 4) Air and 5) Ether

In this order each one is more subtle than the other. The whole universe is made up of these five substances. This universe is called Brahmaand. The human body is also made up of these five substances and we call this Pinda. The attributes of these five substances and their composition in the make-up of the body are as follows:

1. **Earth:** This substance is the most gross of all. It is solid. Its special attribute is smell which we can acquire through our nose. The pleasant or unpleasant smell found in articles is dependent on its content of earthy matter.
2. **Water:** Water is less gross than earth and it is in the liquid form. The special attribute of water is taste which is acquired by the tongue. Water is the cause of sweet, sour and other tastes.
3. **Fire:** This element is finer than water and is found in the form of light or heat. The special attribute of fire is light. Form and colour are dependent on the element of fire and the eye is the organ through which it is perceived.
4. **Air:** Air is finer than the element of fire. It cannot be seen. Its special attribute is touch and this is felt by our skin. We come to know by touching with our skin whether a thing is soft, hard, or rough.
5. **Ether:** This is the most subtle of all the elements. It is present all over in places that appear to be empty. The special attribute of ether is sound and we are able to hear it through our ear.

A summary of the above follows:

Element	Properties	Sensory Organ
Earth	Smell	Nose
Water	Taste	Tongue
Fire	Light	Eye
Air	Touch	Skin
Ether	Sound	Ear

Substances made of these five elements are called material (Bhautik) objects and they are inanimate. They cannot bring about changes to themselves as they do not possess the power of desire to do so. They possess their own properties. They are subject to change according to the laws of nature. For example, water can change into ice or vapour with the effect of cold and heat respectively. It is an inherent quality of water to flow down-wards and therefore it cannot direct its flow upwards. Another quality of water is that it is cool and even when heated it returns to its natural state.

Man, who is endowed with consciousness and power of thinking, studies the inherent properties of these natural elements and makes use of them to satisfy his needs. For example, he can canalize water and obtain hydro-electric power from it or obtain power from steam.

2. Soul (Jeev)

Living object possess consciousness due to the presence of the soul. The soul is also called Jeev or Jeevaatma. Jeev by itself is unseen. It is formless and very subtle. It manifests itself through some form of body. In man, animal, or bird there is a soul but the body itself is not the soul. When man dies the body, which is made up of the five elements, remains but the life force (soul) is not there. Without a soul

the body cannot experience anything nor make any movement. Attributes and definition of the soul have been stated as follows:

Nyaya Darshan (1.1.10) says the attributes and functions of the soul are desire, envy, diligence, pleasure, pain and knowledge. Vaisheshika Darshan (3.2.4) says the attributes and functions of the soul are ; Inhalation and exhalation of air, closing and opening of the eyes, thinking, walking, experiencing hunger and thirst, undergoing happiness and suffering, having desire, being industrious and gaining experience.

The soul is conscious. There is a different soul in every body. There are innumerable souls. The soul, in itself, is not male or female or neuter in terms of sex. It acts in accordance with the body which it has taken. The soul has three attributes:

1. **Aptitude to Act:** It works of its own accord, performing actions that are good or bad.
2. **Aptitude to Experience:** Utilising the sensory organs of the body, the soul has the tendency to enjoy the pleasures of this world and to experience joy and suffering according to its actions.
3. **Aptitude to Know:** The soul has the aptitude to know. It can think, understand and acquire knowledge with experience.

By its nature the soul is not all-knowing. In other words it does not have the capacity to know everything. It does not have knowledge of all countries, all ages and all situations, therefore it is not all-knowing.

The power of the soul has limitations. It can work but cannot do everything on its own accord. The soul is not present all over. It is present only in the bodies of living beings.

The soul has the freedom to do what it likes but its actions are limited by its knowledge and power. The soul is not perfect therefore it does not achieve perfection in all that it attempts to do. Consequently it performs good and bad acts. Although the soul has the freedom to perform actions it is subjected to the fruits of its action. It enjoys the fruit of its good deeds and suffers for its evil action. Justice in the form of reward or punishment is meted out by God.

3. God

The form, characteristics and functions of God are given in the preceding chapter in some detail. Some additional matter is given hereunder.

God is invisible and formless. He is the divine power that exists in the Universe. He does not have a body like ours. Just as the soul which is formless manifests itself through a body, so does God who is formless and invisible manifest Himself through this flowers, sweetness of fruits, brilliance of the sun, movement of the wind, the creation of the stars and planets, etc.

God has created the universe. He uses matter to create the universe. He does not need hands, legs, eyes etc. to create the universe as He is omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent. Verses 8, 11 and 12 of the 6th chapter of the Shwetashwetar Upanishad says: to create the universe is the natural function of God. He does not require a body or sensory organs for this. There is none equal to God so how can there be a being superior to Him. His power is great and incomparable. In Him the natural qualities of knowledge, power and creativity exist. That God who is in everything, is the same One divine power. He is all pervading. He resides in every living being. He judges the deeds of everyone. He witnesses everything. He is a Conscious being. He is not dependent on anyone. He is not bound by the qualities of Sattva, Raja and Tama. He is the controller of inanimate objects. He uses primordial matter to create different worlds.

God is self-existence, intelligence and bliss personified. He is devoid of form, omnipotent, just, benevolent, eternal, infinite, unchangeable, without a beginning, incomparable, support of all, lord of all, omnipresent, omniscient, controller of all from within, undecaying, imperishable, fearless, holy and the maker of the Universe. To Him alone is worship due (2nd Principle of the Arya Samaj).

Dvait, Advait and Trait

Sacchidaanand: This word is used in our religious literature to denote the main characteristics of God, soul and matter. It is made up of three words, Sat, Chit and Aanand. (i) Sat – connotes to be, to stay, to remain, to exist; (ii) chit-means to be aware, to be conscious to have experience; (iii) Aanand – implies to be happy, to find joy, to be free from sorrow.

We shall now see how satchidananda applies to God, Soul and Matter.

Matter: Matter is Sat, that is, it is real and it exists all the time. It has no beginning or end. It changes its form but cannot be destroyed. It is devoid of Chit (consciousness) and Aanand (Bliss).

Soul: Soul is Sat and Chit. It is ever existing. It is eternal, beginning less and endless. At the same time it is Chit. It has life force and it is aware of its existence and has the capacity to know, understand and undergo experience. It also goes through pleasure and pain. However the soul is not an embodiment of Ananda. He finds happiness but together with it he also gets sorrow.

God: God is the embodiment of Sat, Chit and Aanand. He is ever existing, beginningless and endless. He is conscious, all knowing, all powerful and omnipresent. At the same time He is ever happy. He has no sorrow, whatsoever, as He is bliss.

Inter-relationship between God, soul, and matter:

In our Scriptures much thought has been given to discussions held on the relationship between these three entities and many principles have been enunciated from which our Darshan Shastras (Books on philosophy) have been compiled in which God, soul and matter have been discussed in minute detail. The three main principles expounded are broadly given as follows:

The following three terms appear often in the Vedic philosophy. Their meanings are:

1. **Dvaitvaad** (Dualism): The word 'dvi' means 'two'. It refers to two basic types of things in the universe - inanimate and animate - Jad and Chetan - matter and consciousness.
2. **A-Dvaitvaad** (Non-Dualism): The prefix 'A' is for negation. Hence, it denies existence of two. It refers to God as only one.
3. **Traitvaad** (Trinity): Tri means three. This term refers to three eternal entities - i) Prakriti - matter (void of consciousness - Jad), ii) Jeevatma - souls (Chetan) and iii) Ishvar - God (the Supreme Chetan).

QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

1. God is Animate _____, Inanimate _____
2. Matter is real and exists True/False
3. God is Sat, _____ & Aanand
4. Three attributes of soul are :
5. Three eternal entities are:

CHAPTER 5

PRAYER

What is Prayer?

Prayer is the path that takes us to God. During prayer man thinks of God with devotion and faith and endeavors to feel His presence. In the words of Mahatma Gandhi 'prayer is a strong desire to become one with the Creator of the universe'. (Dharm Manthan p 208)

Prayer is the call from the heart of the devotee. He/she wants to open his heart and place it before God. Person feels he is weak, ignorant and wanting therefore he surrenders himself to God and asks for His help and guidance for which he prays and sings in praise of Him.

Why do we pray?

All of us pray to God. In our prayer, we recite Mantras and sing sacred songs. Mantras are verses from the Vedas, which sing the praise of God. The meanings of the Mantras are beautiful and lofty, and they fill the heart with noble thoughts.

The Purpose of Prayer

1. God has many attributes about which we sing during prayer, so that we gain inspiration to cultivate the very same qualities in ourselves.
2. Evil thoughts arise in the mind. By meditating on almighty God/Ishwar, we attempt to free ourselves from such thoughts. During prayer, noble feeling purifies the mind.
3. When we receive something, we give thanks. We praise the donor. By prayer we express our gratitude to God.
4. From prayer arises strength. Fear is banished. Courage is born to follow the path of righteousness as we realize that God is with us.
5. The child experiences happiness and peace in its mother's lap. God is our Father and Mother. During prayer, we experience peace of mind. A child in trouble screams for his mother; similarly, a persona in trouble turns to God. If we pray with sincerity we will experience all the above feeling and our faith in God will gain strength. Therefore, we should pray daily.

Man is weak and consequently he gets into difficulties and suffers pain. He is not able to see his way out of his problems. At such times, he needs comfort and support. A child in distress finds comfort and consolation in the bosom of his mother. Similarly, God, who is our mother gives protection and comfort to those who go to Him when in distress.

It is by intuition that a man thinks of God when he is in difficulties. When he is suffering he seeks the shelter of God and asks for His help. Often man get entangled in difficulties unknowingly. Sometimes suffering comes to him out of no fault of his. Motor car accidents, floods, arson, serious ailments and undue punishments arising from injustice and partiality or wrong evidence are some causes of suffering that come to man when he is not directly responsible. However, the possibility of such suffering coming as a result of some action in the previous birth cannot be ruled out. At such times of suffering man becomes helpless and finds himself at a loss. He then looks for the help and guidance of God. He seeks refuge in God and thereby endeavors to attain peace.

At times, a person knowingly does wrong out of selfishness and suffers for it. Sinful thoughts arise in his mind and lead him to perform evil deeds. He regrets his actions later on. When in such a frame of mind he finds immense consolation in prayer and asks God for His mercy and repents for his evil thoughts and misdeeds. In doing so, he finds his mind relieved. This prayer helps man to get away from evil actions and to raise himself to become a better person. He finds mental and spiritual peace. Mahatma Gandhi says in his 'Dharm Manthan', page 208, "The time of prayer and offering are the most invaluable in life. It is a time when, a man reflects on his past actions and acknowledges his faults. He, thereby, asks for forgiveness and in so doing he finds strength to mend his ways".

In asking God for pardon for his misdeeds, by implication, man repents for his misdeeds and evil thoughts. Therefore, while in prayer a man must take a solemn vow not to repeat his mistakes, to get rid of bad habits and make his life noble. Many a time we, knowingly, do not give up wrong pursuits. This is due to the weakness of the mind. By prayer we develop soul force and resolve firmly to better our lives. By prayer we can over-power our weaknesses.

Prayer means 'asking, requesting, and appealing'. What do we ask of God while praying? While in distress a devotee asks God for His help to enable him to bear the pain and suffering

The effect of prayer is seen in the character of man. External exhibition of rituals in prayer does not help in the evolution of the spirit of man. The use of rosary for jap (repetition of Mantr) and the frequent going to the temple is meaningless if prayer has not transformed the devotee into a better person which would be seen in the degree of his steadfastness to truth and adherence to his religious principles.

Prayer is essential to every individual person, in happiness or in sorrow, in hope or despair, in strength or weakness. Prayer is necessary for one to follow the path of truth and righteousness. Mahatma Gandhi states in Dharm Manthan page 217 'Just as food is necessary for the physical body, prayer is necessary for the soul. Life without prayer is the life of an animal. For man, such life is worse than death".

Congregational Prayer

We have individual prayer and congregational prayer. For the development of one's inner self a person prays by himself. He then devotes as much time as he wants personally. But for the family a collective prayer is necessary for all the members of the family-big and small-to pray together daily. The home atmosphere is purified with such prayer and the family unit is strengthened. At the same time, the right impression is made on the minds of the children at an early age so that when they grow up they do not easily drift away from this practice.

Congregational prayer is necessary for creating a religious atmosphere of purity in the community. Daily congregational prayer in the morning and evening has its beneficial effects. It builds and maintains solidarity in the society. Weekly services are held for communal prayer these days. The practice of this weekly service must be expanded and person must be encouraged and exhorted to attend. Congregational prayer is necessary for the spiritual development of the community and promotes a peaceful atmosphere of a happy co-existence.

Some of the important prayers of the Hindus are given below. We must use these in our daily life. They may be offered in a group or individually. There are many forms of prayers, Yajnyas (havan), Sanskaars (sacraments) and worship in our religion, for which many books are available.

Universal Vedic Prayers

The Universal Vedic Prayer is given below. This prayer must be recited daily. If possible, the whole family should join in prayer at a set time every day. There are five Mantrs in this set of prayer. While reciting the Mantrs, one should pay attention to their meaning. The meaning of the brings peace and strength to the mind and helps purify our thoughts towards virtuous deeds and away from wrong or evil deeds.

Theme of the all of these five Mantrs is that O God; may you guide our intellect in the right direction. And '**Tanme Manah Shiva Sankalpamastu**' (Yajurveda 34-1) – May there be good intentions in the mind, so that he may perform noble deeds. Man asks God for intellect to discriminate the right from the wrong. Prayers help us in the development of noble qualities like truthfulness, forgiveness, justice, patience, fortitude and benevolence.

Repeating of the Mantrs like a parrot without understanding will not give full benefit. During prayer, there must be absolute silence. Give up all other distracting thoughts. Think that Eeshwar/God is present all around you and inside you. Pray with a devoted heart. Learn the correct pronunciation of the Mantrs.

1. Gayatri Mantr or Guru Mantr:

Om Bhoor bhuvah swah, tatasvitur varenyam, bhargo devasya dheemahi dhiyo you nah prachodayaat.

O God, the Giver of life, the Remover of pains and sorrows, the giver of happiness, may we receive the supreme sin-destroying light of the Creator of the Universe. May you guide our intellect in the right direction.

Gayatri is the principal Mantr for universal prayers. It has a purifying effect on the devotee. It has three important ideas:

1. God is the Creator of the universe. He is everywhere, and is also present in all beings.
2. We mediate on His Greatness and being the Source of All True Knowledge.
3. We pray for purity of mind and knowledge of truth.

2. Om vishvaani dev savitar duritani parasuva Yad bhadram tanna aasuva.

O Lord! The Creator of the Universe, please help remove all forms of vices and sorrow from us. Please give us those qualities that are beneficial.

3. Om agne naya supathaa raaye asmaan vishvaani dev Vayunani vidwaan. Yuyodhyasmajjuhu raanameno Bhooyish thaante namah uktim vidhema.

Dear Eeshwar/God You are Ultimate Leader and You always enlighten us. Please, lead us to the noble path of your devotion and grace. Lord, you know all our deeds. Please, help remove from us from all our vices and sins. We offer in every possible way our homage, salutations and humble prayers to You by following Your teachings in our lives.

4. Om Asato maa sadgamaya, Tamaso ma jyotir gamaya, Mrityormaa amritam gamaya.

Om: O Supreme Spirit!

Asato maa sadgamaya: Lead us from untruth to truth,

Tamaso ma jyotir gamaya: Lead us from darkness to light (enlightenment),

Mrityormaa amritam gamaya: Lead us from death to immortality.

5. Om Sarve bhavantu sukhinah, Sarve santu niraamayaah, Sarve bhadraani pashyantu, Ma kashchit dukha bhaagbhavet.

Om: O Lord! Our Protector, by Your grace

Sarve bhavantu sukhinah: May all be happy and prosperous,

Sarve santu niraamayaah: May all be free from misery or illness,

Sarve bhadraani pashyantu: May all realize noble qualities;

Ma kashchit dukha bhaagbhavet: May no one suffer from unhappiness or pain.

Prayers for Health and Long Life

1. Om tanoopa agne asi tanvam me paahi, aayurdaa agne asi aayurme dehi, varchoda agne asi varcho me dehi. Agne yanme tanva oonam tanma aaprina. (Yajur Veda 3:17)

O Lord! You are called Agne because You our Supreme Enlightener, Leader, Guide and Protector. You guide us and enlighten us with true knowledge to live virtuously and have healthy habits. Please help make my body healthy. Please, give me a happy long life. Please help make me strong and full of energy. Please help remove from my body whatever ailments and weaknesses lie therein.

2. Om tat chakshuḥ devhitam purastat chhukram uchcharat. Pashyema sharadaḥ shatam, jīvema (jeevayma) sharadaḥ shatam, shrinuyāma sharadaḥ shatam, prabravaama sharadaḥ shatamadīnaaḥ syaam sharadaḥ shatam, bhūyaḥ (bhooyah) cha sharadaḥ shataat.

O Benefactor of Devotees please give me perfect health and long life. May my eyes, ear tongue and the other organs function in a strong and healthy way for a hundred years. May I not be poor and dependent during this time. Give me a hundred years of joyous life free from disease.

3. Om apah shivah shivatamah shantah, Shantastama staste krinavantu bsheshajam.

O All-pervading Lord: You are beneficent; make me good. You are the Giver of Peace; cure me of my illness. By Thy grace may the germ-destroying medicines prove effective in curing me speedily.

4. Om tryambakam yajamahe sugandhim pushti vardhanam, Urvaruk miva bandhanan mrityor mukshiya ma amritaat.

O Sustainer of the Three Worlds, Destroyer of Illness and Support of all! As a ripe melon gets its release from its pedicel, so free us from disease and give us immortal life.

Prayers for a Happy Family

This prayer should be made a part of the daily prayer of the family.

1. Om anuvratah pituh putro matra bhavatu sammanah.

Jaya patye madhu matim vacham vadatu shantivam. (Atharva Veda 3:30:2)

May the children be obedient and loving to mothers and fathers. May the parents also love their children. May the husband and wife speak gently and live in peace and happiness.

2. Om samaanee prapaa sahavo anna bhaahgah samane yoktre sahavo yunajmi.

Samyanchnim saparyataaraa naabhimivaabhitah. (Atharva Veda 3:30:6)

May all members of the family be treated equally, and may they show courtesy and consideration to one another. As all the spokes of the wheel unite to give motion so let all members of the family make progress with a common aim.

Prayers for Meal Time

Om annapate annasya no dehyanamivasya shushminaah.

Pra pradaataaram tarisha urjam no dhehi dvipade chatushpade.

O Lord, the Giver of Food! May you provide us with healthy and energy-producing food. Grant happiness to those that give in charity. May this food give us strength?

Prayer for School Assembly

1. Om bhur bhuvah swah

tatsavitur varenyam bhargo devasya dhimahi

dhiyoi yo nah prachodayat.

O God You are the Giver of Life, the Remover of pains and sorrows, the bestower of happiness, may we receive the supreme sin-destroying light of the Creator of the Universe. May thou guide our intellect in the right direction.

2. Om shahanvavatu sahanau bhunaktu saha viryam karava vahai.

tejaswinavadhitamastu ma vidwisha vahai.

O God: Let us all unite and protect ourselves. Let us render service to others and let our studies be beneficial and effective. Let there be no hatred among us.

3. Twamev maata cha pitaa twamev, Twamev bandushcha sakha twamev, Twamev vidya dravinam

twamev, Twamev sarvam mama dev dev.

O Lord! You are our Mother and Father,

You are our Closest Brother and Friend,

You are the Source of True Knowledge and Wealth,

You are Everything to us, O Supreme Lord.

4. Sam gachchhadhvam sam vadadhvam sam vo manaamsi jaanataam.

Deva bhaagam yathaa poorve samjaanaanaa uapaasate. (Rig Veda 10:191:2)

Prayers for peace and harmony

Shanti Path (Hymn of Peace)

The Shaanti Paath (Hymn of Peace) is generally recited at the conclusion of a function. Shaanti path can also be used as part of universal prayers.

Why do we say Shaanti three times?

The Hymn of Peace is concluded with the word Shaanti uttered three times. There are three kinds of suffering in this world and we wish to be freed of them. They are:

- I. **Spiritual Suffering:** Suffering of the soul and vices and suffering of the mind; like worry, hatred, jealousy, insanity, evil thoughts, repentance, etc.
- II. **Physical Suffering:** (Pains of the body) e.g. illness such as fever, small-pox, defective vision, hearing, etc.
- III. **Suffering by natural causes:** such as earth-quake, flood, famine, fire, etc., and suffering brought by agents outside the body in instances such as snake bites, attack by a lion, a robber or an enemy.

1. **Om Dyowh shaanti rantariksham shaantih prithivee shaanti raapah shaanti roshadhayah shaantih. Vanaspatayah shaantir vishve devah shaantir Brahmaa shaantih sarvam shaantih Shaantireva shaantih saa maa shanti redhi | OM Shantih! Shantih! Shantih!**

O God! By Your grace the celestial regions be peaceful, the space be peaceful, the earth be peaceful, the waters be peaceful, the vegetation and medicinal plants be peaceful. The entire universe be conducive to peace and prosperity. May Supreme Creator, bring us peace. May there be peace & peace alone! May that peace be with us! May there be Cosmic Peace, Physical and Spiritual Peace

2. **Praataragnim praatarindram havaamahe praatarmitraa varunaa praatarashvinaa. Praatarbhagam pooshanam brahmanaspatih praatassomam ut rudram huvame.**

Dear Eeshwar/God we pray to you, when we wake up in the morning, by remembering Your many names and attributes. Please help enlighten us with true knowledge and help us gain prosperity. May we always remember that You are our always our Friend and as our inner voice guiding us to do virtuous deeds. Also, being Omnipresent, you watch all our deeds and will appropriately punish us if we do bad deeds.

3. **Yajjaagrato dooramudaiti daivam tadu suptasya tathaivaiti. Dooramgamam jyotishaam jyotirekam, tanme manah shivsankalpamastu.**

Dear Eeshwar/God with your grace may my mind, which wanders far and wide while I am awake or asleep, be properly directed by the soul and may have noble and benevolent thoughts, intentions and resolutions.

QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW:

1. Why should we pray?
2. Why must we regard God as our Father and Mother?
3. How should we pray?
4. Write down the Gayatri Mantr and its meaning.

5. What do you understand by Mantr?
6. Write down the meaning of the following Mantrs
 - a. Om Vishwani Dev
 - b. Om Asato Ma
7. Fill in the blanks with the correct words:
Sarve bhavantu _____, Sarve santu _____, Sarve _____,
Pashyantu, ma kaschit _____ bhag bhavet.
8. Remember these words:
Praarthanaa → Prayer;
Shanti → Peace;
Mantr → A religious verse or stanza

CHAPTER 6

MAIN PRINCIPLES OF HINDUISM

The Hindu-Vedic Religion is vast. Within its fold thoughts have been given to various problems and aspects. But it has five main recognized principles, each of which begins with the letter “P”. It is essential for every Hindu-Vedic to understand them. They are:

1. Parameshwar (God)
2. Praarthanaa (Prayer)
3. Punarjanm (Rebirth)
4. Purushaarth (Law of Action)
5. Praanee Daya (Compassion for all living beings or non-violence)

Parameshwar (God)

The First important principle is belief in God - the goal of religious life. The Hindu-Vedic’s aim in life is the realization of God.

Note: The subject, God has already been fully dealt with in Chapter 2.

Praarthanaa (Prayer)

Prayer is the second important principle of Hinduism. It is the path by which God can be reached. By means of prayer the devotee wishes to establish unity with God.

Note: Prayer has also been adequately discussed in the previous Chapter.

Punarjanm (Re-incarnation or Rebirth)

The Concept of Life after Death

Everyone who is born has to die. It is the law of the animate world that whoever is born must die. What happens to the body and the life, which is the soul, after death? This always remains a question.

According to Hinduism the body perishes after death, but this is not the case with the soul. The soul (Aatma) in reality is beyond birth and death. Its so called ‘birth’ is its entry into a body and its so-called ‘death’ is its separation from that body. After it discards a body, the soul enters a new body in accordance with its actions. This cycle is known as REBIRTH or PUNARJANM which is one of the main principles of the Hindu Dharm.

Birth and Death

The animate body comprises of 5 elements: water, fire, air, earth and ether. When the soul enters the body it gives it life. The body is then animated and starts performing actions. It continues doing so long as the soul resides in it. When the body becomes aged, diseased or inactive due to certain reasons, the soul abandons it, causing it to become lifeless. This is known as DEATH. The dead body is unable to perform any action by itself. It decays and eventually perishes. According to Hindu Dharm the body is cremated, as mentioned in Yajurveda (40/15) “BHASMAANTAM SHAREERAM”, ie the body burn to ashes. “Glow of the eyes merge into the element of fire with fire, its life giving breath returns to become one

with the atmosphere, the material body mixes with the earth, the liquid parts unite with water and elements of ether merge into cosmic space.” (Rigveda 10.16.3)

The Soul is Immortal

After death the body perishes, but the soul does not perish because it is by nature immortal. When the soul establishes a link with a body we refer to it as birth, and when it deserts the body we call it death. This means that the soul existed before birth and will exist after death. The Gita (2-28) says :- O descendant of Bharat, all beings are unmanifest in the initial stage, manifest in their middle stage, and unmanifest likewise are they in their final stage. This being so, what is the cause for lamenting?” The Gita (2-23) aptly describes the immortality of the soul thus: *“Weapons cannot injure it; fire cannot burn it; it cannot be drowned in water nor can the wind dry it.”*

What is rebirth (Punarjanm)?

At the time of death the soul does not die. What happens to it then?: The soul follows the cycle of birth after death and vice-versa. It is always discarding an old body and entering a new one. This known as Rebirth. The Gita does not refer to this action as “death” as such, but instead as “the obtaining of another body”.

The Gita (2-13) also says that the body undergoes three stages, viz., childhood, youth and old age. Similarly, death can be understood as the 4th stage when the soul departs from the old body to reside in a new one. In another shlok (2-22) the Gita clarifies this point further :- “Just as a person discards old and tattered clothes and puts on new ones, so does the soul discard the old or weak body and enter a new one”.

Rebirth and the law of action (Karm Phal)

The principal of Rebirth is tied up with the Law of Action. One reaps good or bad fruits in accordance with one’s actions. The Principle of Law of Action applies to both the present life and the life to come, i.e. the life after death. The soul carries with it the impressions of its actions into the next life. (Manusmriti 8-17)

Happiness and sorrow are associated with life from birth. Children are born under varied conditions and circumstances. Some are born cripple or lame, some healthy and some strong. Some take birth in poor homes while others in rich homes. Some are intelligent while some are mentally retarded. Why are these differences found amongst children? Even children born in one home of the same parents have differences among them. Anyone who believes in the Justice of God will not accept that such differences are brought about by acts of God. God cannot practice such thoughtless acts. If he does, then He is partial and unjust.

These differences help to prove the principle of Rebirth (Punarjanm) that is, a person takes birth according to his actions in the previous life. He reaps in the present life the fruit of his actions of the past life. It is with the justice meted out by God that one takes his birth according to his past actions. God is omniscient. He operates with justice and thoughtfulness.

He shows no favouritism and does not err. Man has to accept God’s justice and undergo happiness or suffering according to his deeds in his previous life.

The theory of Rebirth enables one to understand the cycle of life and death. And realize the justice and orderliness in the creation of God. Thus the principles of Rebirth and the Laws of Action (Karm) are inseparable.

QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW:

1. What are the five main principles of Hinduism?
2. How can the body perform its functions? (Name the organs that are involved).
3. Explain what life and death are?
4. What do you understand by rebirth?
5. What does the Bhagavad Gita say in connection with the soul (Aatma)?

Remember these words: -

Parameshwar → God

Punarjanm → Rebirth

Purushaarth → Law of Action, deed

Praanee → A living being

Daya → Compassion, mercy, kindness

Jeev, Aatmaa → Soul

Purusharth (Law of action)

Purusharth is the fourth fundamental principle of Hinduism.

As you sow so shall you reap

The Law of Karm (Action) is an important principle in Hinduism. What does “Law of action mean? This is our everyday experience that man reaps fruits according to his actions. In our daily relationship, we find many examples of action and its (accompanying) fruit: He who does not walk with care on the road meets with an accident; one who eats too much tasty food becomes ill; a student who does not work hard for his examination fails; a shopkeeper who does not pay attention to his business has to suffer losses; a farmer without industry reaps less grain from his farm. Examples of this type may be found in every field of life, and therefore it is said “as you sow so shall you reap”. If you sow the seeds of sour figs you cannot expect to reap sweet mangoes. He who plots the fall of other becomes the victim of his own plot. Man thus suffers the consequences of his own actions.

The Principle of Cause and Effect

The basis of the fruits of action is the law of cause and effect. Whatever I have done, or am doing or whatever has been achieved by my efforts constitutes the effect which must have some cause. A child’s crying is the result of some cause-perhaps he is hungry or he is experiencing pain or someone has hit him. In other words, his crying must have some underlying cause. A bird flies away-someone threw a stone at it or it heard a sound or some much cause made it fly. Therefore, we can say that without cause where can be no action.

This cause/effect relationship extends far; the child is crying because someone hit him. The “Hitting” itself is a resultant action which must have a cause – perhaps the child had used obscene words; the use of obscene words is perhaps the consequence of someone teasing the child. Thus, what is considered a cause may be in a way a result, and this the consequential cause of an action can be easily traced.

In this way that which is deemed to be the consequence can be called the fruits of an earlier action. To become ill, to fail in an examination, to suffer misfortune are all fruits of some or other type of action. Man suffers the consequences of his own actions. It does not always happen that the fruit of an action follows immediately upon the cause. Sometimes results are immediate, at other times belated.

Man’s Effort and Destiny (fate)

Whatever action a man undertakes in this world is his purusharth (man’s effort): He thinks, understands, plans and makes attempts. Sometimes he succeeds, sometimes he fails. Many causes may underlie his success or failure – he has not made full effort, or he lacks the proper means or he has not given adequate thought to his undertaking.

Sometimes it happens that under the same conditions two people undertake the same type of work; yet one succeeds the other fails. At times success comes with little effort, at other times every effort meets with failure; and we sigh ‘my luck is bad, this is the fate destined for me’.

What is this luck and fate? This is the fruit of my former actions. Actions that have been performed in this life or in a previous births. Our good or bad actions do not always bear fruits immediately.

The fruits of past actions are reaped in the present life-and this is called Praarabdh or destiny. Our present actions may be aided or impeded by past actions. Two people under identical circumstances may

this experience opposing results of success and failure. Virtuous past deeds bring success and past sinful actions result in impeding all efforts.

The dispenser in the matter of Praarabdh (destiny) is God. But when the fruits of action will be handed out or how much will accrue, man does not know. Nor does he know in what manner he has to atone for the consequences of his past misdeeds. Man is free to do deeds of his choice, but the reaping of the fruits of his actions is decided elsewhere, by divine justice.

Fruits of action and Rebirth

We have seen in the last chapter that rebirth of the soul takes place in accordance with the actions of the past life. In other words, with birth comes our actions of our former lives. Therefore, the individual has to undergo happiness or suffering. It is seen that some infants are ailing at birth, others are healthy, some are crippled, others strong, some are born in the homes of the rich, others in the homes of the poor. These differences arise on account of actions committed in previous births. The law of cause and effect may be brought forward. If we have not already suffered the consequences of our actions, they have to be suffered the consequences of our actions, they have to be suffered in subsequent births. The happiness/suffering, success/failure in the present life are caused by the actions in our former birth as well.

Man is the architect of his Praarabdh (destiny)

Man must pay the consequences of his own actions. Therefore, when he performs actions in which he is unsuccessful, it is said that what is ordained by destiny must surely happen. The power of fate is the most dominant.

It is true that what is destined must be suffered, but this destiny is the fruit of our past actions. In other words, destiny is fashioned by Karm (action). We must consider the question from the viewpoint of the present life: the actions performed now will fashion our future destiny, which means that we are the architects of our own destiny. Man builds his own Praarabdh. We must accept with fortitude the fruits of past actions, and for the future try to build a beautiful destiny. This is the realistic path.

Sin and Virtue

Man is free to perform actions which may be good or bad. He indulges in evil deeds on account of ignorance, selfishness, hatred etc. The evil actions he commits are sin; the good he performs is virtue. The evil that man commits must be paid for; the question of forgiveness does not arise. Any person or guru can give us advice to follow the path of virtue and to avoid the road of sin, but finally our destiny will be fashioned in accordance with the Karm we perform. In the Yog Vashishth, sage Vashishth says:

“O Raam, one must do virtuous actions, in order to attain good fruits, the consequences of sinful actions are evil. You may perform actions as you please.” In the Garud Puran, it is said: “O man! No. one brings happiness or sorrow to you; whatever actions you have performed, reap the fruits thereof.”

Thus, it is we ourselves, who earn evil or good fruits by our actions. We perform actions of our own free will, and must eat the fruits thereof. The dispenser of the fruits of action is Parmaatmaa (God). The law of the fruits of action inspires man to accept the existence of God, reminding us of the Lord’s justice, omniscience and omnipotence.

QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW:

1. Taking examples from everyday life and show how the fruits of good and bad actions are obtained.
2. Why do some children enjoy happiness while others suffer?
3. How does the story of the fisherman illustrate the fruits of action?
4. Write five sentences on each of the following:
5. Fruits of action
6. Destiny
7. Law of action.

Remember these, words:

Purushaarth—Law of action, deeds;

Bhaagya—Destiny fate;

Guru—Teacher, preceptor;

Karma---Deed, action.

Praanee daya

Companion for all living beings - Non-violence (Ahimsa):

The soul exists in all beings:

Praanee daya or compassion for all living beings is the 5th fundamental principle of Hinduism. According to the Hindu-Vedic faith, it is a sin to bring suffering or death to any living being. It urges man to show love and mercy to all.

Every living being, from the largest beast to the minutest insect has a soul. It is found equally in the elephant as well as in the ant. Like man, other creatures also experience pleasure and pain. Just as we do not like to suffer pain, others also do not like to suffer it. Therefore, we should not cause pain to others. The Gita states, "He who sees the pain and suffering in the other creatures just as he sees in himself, is a Yogi or a man of virtue."

The 18th Mantr of Yajurved, Chapter 36, says:

"Mitrasya chakshushaa sameekhshaamahe."

"May we look at all with a friendly eye."

Non-Violence (Ahimsa) and love:

The compassion for all living beings leads to the great religious principle of non-violence or ahimsa. Among all beings, man is considered the highest. He can think intelligently. He has spread religious thoughts. Religion teaches that we should do good to all, love all, and show mercy to all. The Mahaabhaarat states:

"Ahimsaa paramo Dharmh."

"Nonviolence is the foremost virtue."

If it is agreed that person should love other person, one should not injure the other, the same attitude should be shown towards other creatures. Our feelings of love should be extended to all beings.

Hatred and jealousy must be abandoned. Love must be extended to all - a citizen or a foreigner; the follower of one faith or another; black or white; rich or poor; educated or illiterate.

Reverence for the cow

All beings have souls. That is why we must look upon all with an eye of equality, and not show violence towards any creature. This attitude is expressed in the Hindus' special reverence for the cow; to kill it or eat its flesh is forbidden.

In the life of a man, the cow occupies the same position as a mother in the life of a child. A mother feeds her child on her milk. The cow's milk nourishes man. Children and adults, young and old, men and women, the sick and the healthy, the Hindu-Vedic and the non-Hindu-Vedic, all drink the cow's milk. The Hindus' attitude to the cow is that of a child towards its mother.

How can he even think of killing or eating the flesh of one whose milk has nourished his body?

Reverence for the cow leads to the practice of compassion towards all beings. The cow, therefore, is a symbol, which reminds us to refrain from doing injury to any creature. Having practiced the non-killing of the cow, Hindu-Vedic religion has transferred its practice of compassion towards all creatures in every-day life. Here is a message of the Hindus to the world:

"Dukhite Kuru dayam"-Bhartrihari

"Be kind to those who are helpless or suffering."

The Story of Sage Eknaath and the dying donkey:

This story is of that period when there were no automobiles and railway trains. People traveled from one place to another on foot. In this way, from the point of view of culture and religion, there was a unifying force in India.

During that time, a group of pilgrims, led by Sage Eknaath, visited Kashi (Benares). Kashi is situated on the bank of the Ganges River and it is considered to be a very sacred place. Every year thousands of pilgrims come to this city to bathe in the holy Ganges, to chant prayers in the temples, and to listen to religious discourses given by priests and learned men. In short, they come to purify themselves in body, mind and soul.

The group of pilgrims led by Eknaath proceeded to Raameshwaram, a distance of 1,500 miles. At Raameshwaram, the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea meet. Every member of Eknaath's party carried a slung on his shoulder. On each end of the slung there was a pot filled with water from the Ganges. The water was being carried for offering to the deity in the temple of Raameshwaram. This practice was considered holy and fruitful.

Sage Eknaath walked in front of his group. As it was summer the days were hot and the roads dry and dusty. There were no trees to provide shade. Eknaath saw a donkey dying of thirst. He was moved with pity at the sight of the animal's condition. There was no water anywhere and without water the donkey would die. What should he do? Eknaath had the holy water of the Ganges, which he required to offer in the temple at Raameshwaram.

He went to the donkey and poured it into its mouth. The donkey drank both pots of water. He revived, got up and walked away. The members of Eknaath's party asked: "What offering will you now make at Raameshwaram? Your mission will remain unfulfilled".

Eknaath replied, "When I had water with me how could I allow an animal to die of thirst? What greater sin than that could there be? I have no doubt that God will be pleased with my deed".

QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

1. Why should we not kill?
2. " Look upon all with the eyes of a friend". What do you understand by this?
3. Explain how non-violence leads to love of all beings.
4. Why do we bear the attitude of reverence towards the cow?
5. What did Eknaath consider as the greatest virtue?

Remember these words:

Praanee - Creature, animal;
Daya - Compassion, kindness, mercy;
Ahimsa - Nonviolence;
Himsa - Violence, killing.

CHAPTER 7

YOG (MEDITATION)

What is Yog?

The word Yog means to unite, to join, or to bring together. Thus, Yog is that knowledge or practice by means of which man attains union with God. It is the experience of oneness between the soul and God (Brahmaa).

The purpose of man's life is the attainment of Moksh (salvation), the realization of God through freedom from worldly bondage. It is Yog that shows the path to God-realization. By following the path of Yog the body becomes healthy and free from disease. The mind develops one-pointedness and by means of meditation the path to God-realization is opened. Yog leads to the road to God-realization.

The Basic Principle of Yog

The most important thing for advancement on the path of Yog is control of the mind. In his discourse Patanjali Muni says: ***Yogash chitta vritti nirodhah.***

Yog is the control of the thoughts and inclinations of the mind. Man's mind is fleeting; it is never at rest, always thinking of something or other. It is filled with wishes and desires, and is therefore enwrapped in the pleasures of the senses. On this account man possesses anger, jealousy, hatred, greed, pride and other undesirable qualities. The mind remains trapped in these thoughts which bring restlessness to the individual. When such thoughts are eliminated the mind becomes tranquil, controlled, and is ready to fix itself on one object. Thus, the vital principle of Yog is freeing the mind from restlessness and the cultivation of concentrated attention.

To develop one-pointedness of the mind the Gita (Chapter 6-35) gives two methods (ways), practice and renunciation. The mind is every running hither and thither because it is entrapped in the enjoyment of worldly, sensual pleasures. The mind must be drawn away from these pleasures of the senses, and out of this withdrawal renunciation is born by constant practice. In this way, the mind achieves tranquility and one-pointedness.

The Eight Techniques of Yog (Ashtaang Yog)

For perseverance in the path of Yog, Patanjali Muni has devised eight techniques or courses. These may also be referred to as the eight (asht) limbs (anga) or steps of Yog

1. Yam

Yam (moral observance) are 5 in number.

- 1) Satya or truthfulness
- 2) Ahimsa or non-violence
- 3) Asteya or non-stealing
- 4) Brahmacharya or celibacy
- 5) Aparigraha or non-covetousness.

2. Niyam

Niyam-physical disciplines includes 5 aspects

- 1) Purification
- 2) Contentment

- 3) Austerity
- 4) Study
- 5) Devotion to God.

In the path of Yog it is absolutely essential to practice moral observance and physical disciplines (yam and niyam respectively) for it is only then that tranquility and meditation are attained.

3. Aasans (Yog postures)

It aims at practicing the yoga postures as a preparation for meditation. Posture means to sit motionless in any comfortable position for a long time. It is only the ability to hold the body still as a prerequisite for deep meditation.

4. Praanaayaam (breath control)

Praanaayaam is a special method of breath-control with which prana or the life-force is brought under control and made regular. This is achieved by controlling the incoming and outgoing breath.

Praana means breath, but only because of the close connection that exists between the breath and the causative flow of energy in the body. It increases the ability to hold the breath for a long time so that energy can be controlled. By performing these breathing exercises one can hold the energy within the body.

There are four kinds of these Praanaayaam as per the Yog-Darshan:

1. Baahya Praanaayaam - Force exhale and hold the breath outside as long as possible
2. Aabhyaantar Pranayama - Deep inhale and hold the breath inside as long as possible
3. Stambhavriti Pranayama - Suspend the breathing process intermittently while breathing in or out
4. Bahya-aabhyaantar vishayakshepi Pranayama - Arrested breathing while inhaling and exhaling : This means drawing the breath forcibly inside when it has a tendency to go out and throwing it forcibly outside when it has a tendency to go in. By thus counteracting the inspiration and expiration both, the movements are kept in check and control of the breath leads to subjugation of the mind and senses.

This process increases the strength and energy and so sharpens the intellect that it can easily apprehend the most abstruse and subtle problems. This helps the development of vital fluid in the man's body which in turn helps with firm strength, courage, control of senses and acquisition of knowledge of all sciences in less time.

5. Pratyahaar (sense-control)

Pratyahaar means abstraction, the ability to withdraw the senses or internal organs from the centers or objects to which they are attached. The natural inclination of the senses towards the objects of enjoyment leads the mind astray.

When children in a classroom hear some loud noise outside they immediately look through the window and do not pay attention to their studies. But if their minds were engaged in their studies, no noise or distraction would have the power to lead them astray.

So, the ability to withdraw the senses from the objects of attachment is Pratyahaar. Just as a tortoise withdraws all its limbs in the face of danger, an aspirant must completely withdraw his senses from all objects.

6. Dhaaranaa

When the mind is withdrawn from outside objects and is totally fixed on an idea or a center it is said to be concentrated. In concentration, all the rays of the mind are collected and fixed on a center or idea. No painter, sculptor, musician, sportsman, or student can hope to succeed if his mind is not engaged in the task on hand. So, in Yog also, concentration of Dhaaranaa is essential.

The test of the Kauravs and the Paandavs:

The one hundred Kauravs and the five Paandavs gathered in the grounds to take part in a tournament. They were to be tested by Guru Dronaachaarya. Grandfather Bhishma, blind King Dhritaraashtra, Gandhari, the mother of the Kauravs, and Kunti, the mother of the Paandavs, were present to see them compete. Horse riding, wrestling, club duel and other minor competitions were over. Now came the most important one, Archery. The gathering was excited. "Who will win?" they asked themselves.

Guru Dronaachaarya placed a clay bird on a branch of a tree. The eye of the bird was to be the target for the archers; it shone brilliantly in the light of the day.

The Guru called the first competitor. He was Yudhishtir. Yudhishtir came forward and set an arrow in his bow. The Guru asked: "Son, can you see the bird?" "Yes", said Yudhishtir. The Guru asked: "What else do you see?" Yudhishtir replied: "I see the tree, you, and the people who have gathered here". Dronaachaarya, in disgust, said: "Go and sit down".

Next to step forward was Duryodhan, the eldest of the Kauravs. The Guru asked him the same questions. "I see, my brothers and the other objects around me", replied Duryodhan. Dronaachaarya sent him away also.

Competitors came one by one, to take part in the contest. They failed the preliminary test and were not allowed to shoot at the target.

The last competitor was Arjun. He lifted his bow and took aim. "Son, what do you see?" asked Dronaachaarya. "I see the tree and nothing else", said Arjun. A few moments later the Guru asked: "What do you see now?" Arjun replied: "Now I see the bird, and now, only the eye of the bird". Dronaachaarya was pleased. "Shoot", he said. Arjun's arrow left the bow and found the target. Arjun won because he had complete control over his mind and senses.

7. Dhyaan

When the mind is fully engaged in a particular thought or idea without interruption, it is said to be in Dhyaan. Establishment of a concentrated mind on a particular thought or idea is called Dhyaan. In this state, a person forgets his surroundings, his body or anything that is connected with him. Even the pleasures that interest him at other times or his pet fancies, or worries or tensions of his daily life do not trouble him whatsoever at this time. For example, a painter, when engrossed in painting, will completely forget his surroundings, and will not hear anyone who may be calling him at the time. This proves his mind is one-pointed, totally absorbed in his work. In Yog, because the object of

concentration is God or the Absolute, all the powers of the mind are directed to the contemplation of God.

The mind of the Yogi in the state of Dhyaan is compared to the light of a lamp which burns without flickering in a windless place. In this state, the mind is calm and enjoys immense bliss, a foretaste of the uninterrupted bliss and boundless joy which is inherent in the very nature of God or the Supreme Consciousness.

On what should attention be fixed?

During meditation, the mind should be fixed on the form, attributes and work of God. Fix thoughts on Gayatri Mantr together with its meaning; or meditate on Om. Patanjali Muni says in his Yog Darshan (1-24-28) that during meditation one should do jap of Om. The jap must be done with feeling and understanding. If the mind is not fixed, jap is done in vain.

8. Samaadhi

Samaadhi is the final state of meditation in Yog. In Pratyahaar the mind is withdrawn from its external attachments and in Dharana the mind is concentrated on a single idea or thought. In Dhyaan concentration becomes established or fixed.

Meditation is the result when complete fixation is achieved, without any interruption in the steadiness of the concentrated faculties of the mind.

Samaadhi is the final step in meditation or contemplation. In meditation, the final experience of the saadhak is oneness with Parabrahm. Oneness with Parabrahm or the Supreme Consciousness is the true meaning of Yog. This final union with God confers supreme bliss, felicity, and an end of all sorrows. This state transcends all thought and all logical processes such as thinking, reflecting and calculating cease to function. Samaadhi is perfection, the crowning glory of success in the spiritual realm. This is Yog.

QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

1. What is the meaning of Yog?
2. How should we meditate?
3. What are Aasans? Describe Padmaasan.
4. Explain the three stages of Praanaayaam.
5. How did Arjun learn to aim his bow and arrow?

Remember these words:

Yog - Meditation
Muni - Sage
Aasan - Physical posture
Praanaayaam - Breath control

6. What is Ashtaang Yog?
7. Name any THREE of eight techniques of Yog.
8. Yog is the experience of oneness between the and
9. By following the path of Yog the body becomes and free from
10. Name any TWO of five moral observances of Yam.

11. Name any TWO of five physical disciplines of Niyam.
12. is a special method of breath-control.
13. Aasans regulate, ensure proper digestion of food and increase
14. Name the three stages of Pranayaam.
15. The ability to withdraw the senses from the objects of attachment is
16. Establishment of a concentrated mind on a particular thought or idea is called
17. During meditation, the mind should be fixed on the, attributes and of God
18. is the final state of meditation in Yog.

CHAPTER 8

YAJNYA

Meaning of Yajnya

The word Yajnya is derived from the root yaj which has three meanings:

- (1) Prayer of God
- (2) Unity and
- (3) Donation

Whenever this triple attitude is present in any action, such action is termed Yajnya. In the act of performing havan (Agnihotr), sacred verses (Mantra) are recited in prayer. When Yajnya is performed members of the family and others get together and after the Yajnya learned persons and charitable organizations are given donations. In this way, all three meanings of Yajnya given above become part of procedure when Yajnya (havan) is performed. (more details are given in next section)

Charity and service to fellow beings and care of animals and other creatures is also Yajnya although this service does not include the performance of havan. To dispel the ignorance already prevalent amongst the people by educating them is known as Jnana Yajnya. The continuation and expansion of agricultural activities is called krishi (agricultural) Yajnya). To extend hospitality to visitors is atithi (guest) Yajnya. These are some indications of the spirit of service, renunciation and sacrifice implied in the meaning of Yajnya.

To light the fire of the havan and offer ghee and saamagree is to perform the physical Yajnya. The Yajnya takes the spiritual form when it disciplines the mind and the intellect and kindles the inner spiritual light of the aatma (soul) and it burns up evil desires such as anger, greed, jealous, pride etc. with the fire of knowledge. The Gita exhorts us in chapter 4 verse 27: 'The Yogis sacrifice all the functions of the senses and those of breath (vital energy of Prana) in the fire of the Yog of self-restraint kindled by knowledge.

The Yajnya is thus a very advanced medium of taking one towards God by lighting the Aatm-Jyoti.

What is Havan (Agnihotr)?

In all rituals, the Yajnya or havan is the most important part. It is a necessary part of 16 SAMSKAARS. When the Yajnya is performed a fire is lit. Dry wood, which is free from impurities, is used to kindle the fire. Ghee or purified butter and saamagree are offered into it. The saamagree is made of leaves, roots and twigs, which are sweet scented and have a medical value. The act of putting ghee and saamagree into the fire is called aahuti.

Mantrs are recited all through the Yajnya ceremony. Mantrs are Vedic verses of prayer. They manifest the devotion of the worshipper and convey the entreaties to God. An aahuti is offered after each Mantr is recited. When the aahuti is offered into the fire the worshipper says, "Swaahaa". One meaning of Swaahaa is, "The Mantr has been said with all humility and sincerity." Another meaning is, "This is my offering to God. All that I have is not mine. It belongs to Him".

Fire, Light and Lamp

When we perform the havan we kindle a fire. The fire gives light. The clay lamps, which burn at the places where ceremonies are performed, also give light. This light sparkles in the dark and illuminates the surroundings.

With the light of a lamp a traveler finds his way in the dark. Otherwise he could lose himself. He might stumble and get hurt.

Light is also the symbol of knowledge. With the help of it we can dispel the darkness of ignorance and find the straight and virtuous path.

When we kindle the fire in a Yajnya or burn a clay lamp we light also the lamp of our souls. With the help of its light we are able to see God in our hearts. Our thoughts become purified and we become enlightened. That is why we pray:

***Asato ma sad gamaya;
Tamaso ma jyotir gamaya;
Mrityor ma amritam Gamaya.***

O God, Lead us from untruth to truth;
Lead us from darkness to light;
Lead us from death to immortality.

Benefits of the Havan (Agnihotr)

While performing the Yajnya we pray to God and sing verses in praise of Him. These verses have lofty thoughts which describe the attributes and functions of God. The verses urge us to perform good deeds and make our lives nobler. Through the Yajnyas we get the opportunity of studying the Vedas and other scriptures and in this way the intellect and the mind become pure.

One big benefit from the Yajnya is that it purifies the air and the surrounding atmosphere. Germ-destroying, health-promoting and sweet-smelling ingredients are used in the oblation. They destroy the disease-carrying germs and purify the air. The warm air of the Yajnya spreads to all places in the home and its surroundings and thus drives out foul air. It is in the nature of the fire to break up the ingredients of the saamagree into atoms and spread them around and thus destroy the germs that spread disease.

These days many medicines (germicides) are used to destroy germs that spread disease. These medicines are beneficial but they also contain some kind of poison which is sprayed in the air. The air is thus polluted with the possibility of harmful effects. This pollution spreads into the air and enters our body. It settles on our food and drinks and enters the stomach. For example, D.D.T. was used in the USA to disinfect stables housing cattle. The D.D.T. affected the milk of the cows. This was found out when children who drank the dairy milk became ill.

In contrast to this discovery an interesting case was cited in the report of the department of health of the Province of Punjab in India. During an epidemic of plague, it was noticed that the occupants of certain homes were not much affected by this disease. Upon investigation, it was learnt that the less affected homes were those of members of the Arya Samaj who were in the habit of performing Yajnyas (havens) daily. This discovery bears evidence of the fact that the Yajnya helps to kill germs and purify the atmosphere.

The Yajnya (Agnihotr) also has an effect on the seasons. In particular, it helps to regulate rainfall and temperature, thereby minimizing conditions of drought and reducing the risk of crop failure. The Yajnya also helps in regulating the seasons. The ghee and saamagree offerings burn and break up into tiny particles. These are carried by the air in the form of vapor into the atmosphere. They rise higher until they mix with the cold air and help in the condensation of vapor to form clouds as the forerunner of rain.

The possibility of the Yajnya helping in the causation of rain is also given in the Gita (chapter 3.14) which states: ***'From food are beings born, from rain is good produced, from sacrifice does rain arise'***.

The Manusmriti (chapter 3.76) says: ***'The offerings made through the Yajnya break into very tiny particles and rise towards the sun and give cause to rain'***.

The possibility of rain, however, is dependent on other factors such as the presence of moisture in the atmosphere.

Panchamaha Yajnya (Five Important Daily Duties)

For a deck on Five Daily Duties, [click here](#):

Every Hindu householder is enjoined to perform five daily Yajnyas. These are five forms of religious and social obligations. They are given in the Manusmriti (chapter 4.21) as follows:

1. Brahm-yajnya: Prayer, meditation and study of the scriptures.
2. Dev-yajnya: Performance of Agnihotr (havan).
3. Pitri-yajnya: Service to mother, father and elders.
4. Atithi-yajnya: Hospitality and service to the learned ones and visitors.
5. Bhoot-yajnya (aka Balivaishva-Dev-Yajnya): Service to living beings.

These five Yajnyas must be fulfilled daily. They are termed as Maha Yajnyas or great duties. By carrying out these duties, a householder makes his life religious and he develops a sense service towards his fellow beings. The important significance of these Yajnyas is that, through them, the householder takes on the responsibility of providing for the needs of all living beings. Most of all, he must see that no one goes hungry. The essential functions of the five Maha Yajnyas are given.

1. Brahm-Yajnya or Sandhyaa (Twilight Meditation)

Brahmaa is a name of God because He is the largest of all beings and He creates the universe. Brahm-Yajnya is prayer to and contemplation of Him. We have the Sandhyaa for our daily prayer. Sandhyaa means sound meditation. When one is at Sandhyaa one concentrates on God while reciting Vedic Mantras in praise of His attributes and His creation.

Another meaning of Sandhyaa is – uniting or getting together. Through the medium of Sandhyaa a person becomes engrossed in communion with God and becomes one with Him.

The Sandhyaa is recited twice daily, in the morning at dawn when there is the blending of the darkness of the night with the light of the day, and at sunset when the light of the day makes way for the darkness of the night. These hours of the day provide an ideal, natural atmosphere for concentration. The working day is begun with the thought of God and it is closed with thoughts again on Him for a peaceful and restful night.

Sandhyaa should be done at a clean and secluded place to help the mind to concentrate and be free from distraction. The environment should be conducive to the promotion of peace and happiness. After a bath, clean clothes should be worn as bodily cleanliness, psychologically, lends to the purity and peace of mind. If possible, a separate room should be set aside for daily Sandhyaa and prayer.

Self-study of religious books is also termed as Brahm-Yajnya. Brahmaa also means knowledge. By right knowledge our thoughts become pure, our powers of judgment are improved and our determination for performing right actions is reinforced. Every day some time should be set aside with regularity for the study of our scriptures.

Self-study in relation to Brahm-Yajnya does not imply that several religious books must be read but it means that some study of our scriptures-Vedas, Upanishads, Gita etc must be made daily. One must select those scriptures that are appealing. Our scriptures are written by seers and sages without any selfish motive or emotional bias. They have a profound effect on the mind. Such scriptures can be read with the assistance of learned persons in any language.

2. Dev Yajnya or Agnihotr (Havan)

DevYajnya is also called Agnihotr or havan. We have already discussed the benefits and significance of Yajnya.

When Yajnya is performed its radiation is felt by the devotees. The spirit of Yajnya is benevolence, renunciation, sacrifice and unity. Man must shine by the burning out of anger, greed, ego, jealousy and other evil desires in him just as the flame of the Yajnya shines when ghee and havan saamagree burn up in the fire.

When chanting the havan Mantrs we say in unison 'idamagnaye idann mama'. It means that all the wealth, material belongings, power and other possessions are not ours. We have possessed them with the grace of the Almighty God. We shall consider them as belonging to the Creator and use them for the benefit of everybody. This is the spirit of the Dev-Yajnya that should be ever present in us during the performance of Yajnya.

3. Pitri Yajnya

The word pitar means our parents and elders. Service to and care of them is Pitri Yajnya. They bring up their children by providing them with food, clothing, shelter and education. When the children grow up it becomes their bounden duty to take care of their elderly members of the family and to respect and obey them.

In old age, our parents become frail and weak. It is then that they need special attention. Our scriptures say Matri Devo Bhav: Pitri Devo Bhava meaning-mother and father are worthy of reverence. Therefore, it is the duty of every householder to show respect to his elders and satisfy all their wants. The fulfilment of this duty is Pitri Yajnya.

4. Atithi Yajnya

An atithi is a person who visits someone unexpectedly. That is, he does not give notice of his date and time of arrival. Service and hospitality to such persons is atithi Yajnya. This Yajnya (service) is an

important characteristic of the Hindu Dharm. The concept of service to mankind is embodied in this Yajnya. Its beauty lies in giving practical effect to the spirit of love and goodwill towards all people.

The structure of Hindu Society in ancient times was such that holy men such as sadhus, sannyasis, saints and mahatmas did not live with their needs. Similarly, the guru (teacher) and pupil lived on the food and donations of the householders. The householders were ever ready to give them hospitality with love and sincerity. They did not feel it a burden to provide them with their need and looked forward anxiously to receiving such unexpected visitors. They fed their visitors and then had their own meals. These holy men, on the other hand, brought sanctity to the home and surroundings of their hosts by their conduct and preaching and guidance to live a life of moral uprightness.

5. Bhoot Yajnya

The meaning of bhoot is a sentient being or one that has life. One of the bounden duties of householder is to take care of fellow beings and domesticated animals like the cow, buffalo, horse, dog, cat, and birds such as the pigeon, sparrow, and parrots which are helpful to man. Wild animals fend for themselves. Bhoot Yajnya also implies non-killing of such animals. There is life in animal and we should be merciful towards them. Man is the greatest of all living beings. His greatness should be depicted in his doing good to all living beings and protecting them. Wild animals and creatures are also helpful to man but he often does not know it. For example, the snake and the owl are man's friends. They eat rats and other pests on the farm and thereby protect our food crops.

We have explained in this chapter the five Maha Yajnyas (important duties) and that it is the bounden duty of the householder to understand them and to fulfil their obligations in respect of them, for it is by so doing that a religious atmosphere is created, good-will is established and peace is maintained all over the world.

QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

1. Describe the performance of Havan of Yajnya?
2. What do the fire of a Havan and the light of a ritual signify?
3. What is the meaning of SAMSKAAR? Illustrate your answer from examples out of domestic life.
4. Write brief notes on the following: -
 - a. Yajnya,
 - b. The Lamp,
 - c. Food Feeding Ceremony,
 - d. Marriage Ceremony.

5. Use the correct word from the following to fill in the blanks: light; Swaahaa; aahuti (offering); knowledge; sixteen; mind; intellect; eleventh.

The action of pouring of ghee in the Yajnya is called _____. During a Yajnya _____ is said after reciting a Mantr. A lamp gives _____. It symbolizes _____.

Hindus have _____ Samskars. With the help of Samskars we purify our _____ and _____. The naming ceremony is performed on the _____ day after birth.

6. Name any TWO of the five Panchamaha Yajnya given in the Manusmriti.
7. What is Brahm-yajnya?

8. What is Dev-yajnya ?
9. What is Pitri-yajnya ?
10. What is Atithi-yajnya ?
11. What is Bhoot-yajnya ?

CHAPTER 9

Sixteen Sanskaars (Sacraments)

Meaning of Sanskaar (Sacrament)

What is Sanskaar? Sanskaar means the act of purifying, reforming or bringing about refinement. Every person wishes to see that his child grows up to be a person who is cultured and of good character. The religious ceremonies that are intended to ensure that the individual follows the path of righteousness in life, are called Sanskaars. There are sixteen Sanskaars.

Sanskaar also means the act of making an impression that would determine the future quality of life. The influence of the environment and associations affect the character of the child. Good influences are conducive to right living while undesirable influences have an adverse effect on character. The sixteen Sanskaars (sacraments) are intended to ennoble the life of an individual and prevent him from joining undesirable company, and influence him to become a useful citizen.

Importance of Sanskaars

When one wants a comfortable chair, one does not nail together pieces of rough and badly shaped wood from the forest. The rough wood is cut, stripped, rounded, smoothed, polished and made into an attractive article of furniture for the house.

We sweep and polish and dust our homes. We wash and keep our clothes clean. We are not happy if our home and clothes are not clean.

We also keep our body clean by taking our daily bath. Thus, it becomes a part of our nature to keep ourselves clean for we know that if we don't do this, unpleasant odors will be emitted by the body and it will invite disease-carrying germs. We will thereby bring harm to ourselves. We are therefore mindful of keeping our home, our clothes and our body clean.

External cleanliness forms only a part of one's life but purity of mind, intellect and the Aatma (soul) are more important. The mind must show an eagerness to seek the truth; one's heart must become kind and liberal; the intellect must be characterized by purity; and the soul must be free of all sins. In this way, human life can be raised to a nobler plane.

For the achievement of the higher ideal of purity of the mind, intellect and soul, the rishis have formulated a system of religious ceremonies known as Sanskaars. There are sixteen of them. The initial Sanskaar marks the beginning of life and the final Sanskaar is performed at the time of death. The Sanskaars are meant to invoke the blessings of God to make the individual an embodiment of truth and goodness. The Sanskaars form a system of elevating man from an animal-like life to the elevated status of a truly noble person.

The mind of the individual tends to become corrupt very easily and develops qualities of anger, greed, envy and pride. For the sake of personal gain, one may resort to lying, cheating, deceit, acts of injustice and even crime. It is only by ridding oneself of such undesirable and evil qualities that a person can maintain his human dignity. But it is not simple to make one's life free of faults without a conscious and determined effort to rectify all actions that are questionable. Unbridled behaviors have to be curbed and new values have to be established on the basis of righteousness. In order to succeed in such an endeavor, the habit of right living must be inculcated early in life. The Sanskaars chalk out the path that

must be followed to achieve the highest ideal at every stage in life. By means of the sacraments the most benevolent influences are brought to bear on the child even from the prenatal stages.

The Sanskaars: Direction to Life

In the journey of life, the Sanskaars could be regarded as sign boards indicating the direction that must be taken at each stage. From the time of birth, the child begins to grow rapidly; provision is made for his education; at a certain age, he marries and participates fully in the various facets of life. By the time he completes his family obligations, his physical decline begins and he has to cope with the problems of old-age; and at last the final phase of life comes to a close. In order that life may be purposeful it has to move in the direction that will bring the desired result, without making it a fruitless, earthly existence.

The comparison made above with a traveler is ideally suited to life itself. The sixteen Sanskaars give direction to life at every crucial stage. If the cross roads did not have sign boards to indicate the different directions, the traveler would not be able to take the road that leads to his destination.

The rishis have made it possible for a person, by means of the Sanskaars, to move along the path that will lead to the ultimate fulfilment of life.

The body and the intellect of the baby start developing while he is in the womb. After his birth, the development of all parts of the body is accelerated. Therefore, it becomes necessary to perform Sanskaars in both the prenatal and postnatal development stages of the child. Cognizance is taken of the physiological and sociological growth of the child in relation to his environment when the various Sanskaars are performed.

Before the birth of a child three Sanskaars are performed. A child is born; it is given a name; with the growth of the body, the milk-teeth make their appearance; it begins to take more solids as food; having attained a certain age, the child is sent to school; and after having completed his studies, he is also regarded as having attained physical maturity. He thus reaches the stage in life when he could enter the Grihasth ashram which commences with the wedding ceremony. Each of the stages indicated is marked by the performance of a Sanskaar. At every Sanskaar he is reminded of his duties and responsibilities and so he forges ahead along the path of his life.

In addition to the favorable influence that the Sanskaars create on the growing child, the parents and other who are closely associated with the child also become conscious of their responsibilities to make the future of the child as bright and successful as possible. The Sanskaar contributes to a more wholesome atmosphere at home, while the family is reminded about the importance of a religious code of life. The Sanskaars engender in the youth a desire to live in accordance with the teachings of religion. They become conscious of the dictates of Dharm and they regard it as their duty to adhere to the teachings of the scriptures.

Unfortunately, the Sanskaars are not strictly followed by the general body of Hindus today. Even those Sanskaars that are performed have lost their original form and in many cases additional local customs have become a part of them. It seems that the social aspect has gained in importance and the Sanskaar itself occupies a place of lesser significance. When the Sanskaar takes the form of a social occasion, the cost involved in such a function becomes considerable. If a sanakara is restored to its original form and if only close relations and friends are invited, there will be a greater appreciation of the value of Sanskaars.

THE SIXTEEN SANSKARS

1. Garbhaadhaan

This Sanskaar follows the wedding ceremony when the couple decides to be blessed with a child. In this Sanskaar they pray for a healthy and noble child.

2. Punsavan

Three months after conception, the Punsavan Sanskaar is performed. The parents pray for the grace of God to ensure the sound development of the child in its embryo stage.

3. Seemantonnayan

This Sanskaar is performed at the end of the sixth or eighth month after conception for the full development of the organs.

4. Jaatakarm

On the day of birth, the child is welcomed into the world with the Jaatakarm Sanskaar.

5. Naamakaran

On the eleventh day after birth the Namakaran Sanskaar is performed and the child is given a name. The name chosen is intended to be a source of inspiration in the life of the individual.

6. Nishkraman

After the fourth month, the NishkRaamn Sanskaar is performed and the child is taken out in the open air for its acquaintance with nature. The child is exposed to the health-giving rays of the sun and there is a prayer for long life. From now onwards, the child would be nurtured in the lap of nature.

7. Annapraashan

The time for this Sanskaar is when the teeth begin to appear, between the sixth and the eighth month. It is at this stage that the child is introduced to solid food.

8. Choodaakarm

From the first to the third year is the period for this Sanskaar, when all the hair from the child's head is removed for the first time. At this time, there is a prayer for good health and sound mental development.

9. Karnavedh

When the child is three years of age, this Sanskaar is performed by piercing the lower lobes of his ears, and a prayer is said for the child's physical well-being.

10. Upanayan

This Sanskaar is performed any time from the age of five to eight years. Upanayan means getting closer to someone. With this Sanskaar, the child is placed in the care of the guru (teacher). It is given the yajnyopaveet (sacred thread) which consists of their separate strands. The sacred thread symbolizes the vow of the child to follow a path of life as laid down by the scriptures. Brahmacharya, or celibacy, is of prime importance in the life of a student. He has to exercise self-restraint and abstain from all forms of

indulgence. The formal education commences immediately after this sanskaar. The three strands of the sacred thread represent the three letters of OM. They also denote the three disciplines of life, namely, knowledge, action, and devotion. The student adopts a rigorous code of conduct for the attainment of a life that is virtuous and noble.

11. Vedaraambh

Immediately after the Upanayan the Vedaraambh Sanskaar is performed. At this stage, he commences with the study of spiritual knowledge as contained in the Vedas and Shastras. All the branches of knowledge including science become his field of interest and study. In this way, he prepares to seek progress in the material world while, at the same time he is strengthening his spiritual life. The teacher explains to him the Gayatri Mantr and its significance. The student fervently prays for the attainment of a sound intellect.

12. Samaavartan

This Sanskaar is performed between the twenty-first to the twenty-fifth year, when the student has completed his studies. The appropriate degree is conferred on him by the guru. The graduate of the Gurukul is then on the threshold of a new life of self-reliance and independence. Henceforth he participates fully in the social and the economic life of the community.

13. Vivaah (Marriage)

After having completed the stage of Brahmacharya, the student may decide to marry and move to the next stage in life, which is that of the householder (Grihasth ashram). It is at this, time that the Vivah Sanskaar is performed. The male is expected to be about twenty-five years of age while the female should have attained the age of sixteen year. Two individuals who had lived independently now form a life-long companionship. It becomes a life of unity based on perfect harmony. After marriage when children are born of them the continuity of the family tree is maintained.

14. Vaanaprasth

This Sanskaar marks the completion of the Grihastha aashram at the age of fifty-one year and the commencement of the Vanaprastha aashram. A person renounces all occupations from which personal benefits accrue. He hands over all his family responsibilities to his son and thus makes way for the succeeding generation. He is then free to follow a life of austerity and meditation. There is no limit, however, to the actions he may perform in the service of mankind.

15. Sannyas

Although the holy order of Sannyas is taken at the age of seventy-five year, a person could enter the Sannyas aashram whenever his self-discipline and spirituality enable him to renounce all worldly attachment. At the time of the Sanskaar he renounces his wealth, family ties and desire for fame. The saffron robe of a sannyasi is a symbol of a life of austerity. He does not belong any more to a particular family or community and he has no fixed abode. His outlook becomes completely universal.

16. Antyeshti

When a person dies his body is cremated. This takes the form of the Antyeshti Sanskaar. The soul is immortal. When the body is consumed by the fire, the five elements – namely earth, water, fire, air and

ether once more become part of nature. The prayers that are recited are for the peace of the departed soul and the comfort of the members of the bereaved family. Cremation is the best way for the disposal of the dead body.

QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW

1. How many are total Sanskaars
2. Sanskaar is act of _____
3. Sanskars are conducted - Throughout the life/Middle of life/End of life

CHAPTER 10

Virtues: Morals and Ethics

Greatness cannot be bought by big homes and rich clothes; neither by wealth, nor by learning, greatness can be obtained by only one means and that is by acquiring the qualities of a good person.

Truth, compassion, love, non-violence, fair play, humility, charity, forgiveness, courage, tolerance are all virtues. They should become a part of our nature. If we do not possess them then all the kirtans we sing, all the prayers we say and all the rituals we perform will not help to make us better people.

Virtues must be cultivated from childhood. A seedling can be made to grow in the direction, which the gardener wants it to take. Similarly, a child can be made to accept the character, which his parents and teacher desire for him. And if that character is full of virtues like truthfulness, compassion love, service to parents, devotion to teacher, humility, fearlessness and obedience, then the child has every hope of becoming a virtuous person in life.

Stories illustrating some of the virtues we should possess are given below. By reading them, the children as well as the adults, will be impressed by the lesson they purport to teach.

1. Truth

Satyamev jayate naanritam - Truth always triumphs; untruth is always vanquished (Upanishad)

Satyenottabhita bhoomih - The world abides in truth: Rig Ved

The Test of Harishchandra (A story from Puraan)

Many thousands of years ago a king lived in Ayodhya. His name was Harishchandra. He was a pious king and always spoke the truth. He never broke his promise. He ruled over his people wisely.

The king's fame as a ruler spread far and wide. In those days, there lived a sage whose name was Vishwaamitr. He heard of the King's truthful nature and decided to test him. Vishwaamitr arrived at the court of the king. The king asked the sage of what service he could be to him. The sage said, "Will you give me whatever I ask. The King said, "Yes" Then the sage asked him for his entire kingdom.

Harishchandra had never gone back on his word. The Sun might rise in the west but he would not swerve from the path of truth. The king gave his whole kingdom to the sage. The sage demanded, in addition to the kingdom, his dakshina (gift given to a holy person). Harishchandra had nothing left with him now. He asked the sage for some time in which he could find the dakshina.

Harishchandra, his queen Taaraamti and his son Rohit took off their royal robes and dressed themselves as ordinary people. They looked for work. After much searching Taaraamti found employment as a maid in the house of a Brahmin. Rohit stayed with her. Harishchandra became a guard of a crematorium. Whoever came to cremate his dead had to pay a fee which Harishchandra collected for the owner of the yard. Whatever wages Harishchandra received was given to Vishwaamitr as part payment of his dakshina.

One day Rohit went to a park to pluck flowers for his master who wanted to use them in his worship. A snake bit him and he fell to the ground unconscious. When Taaraamti saw her son, she thought he was dead and began to weep. She carried him to the yard to be cremated. Harishchandra recognized his wife and was shocked to learn what had happened to his son. But there was no time for sentiment. He had a

duty to perform and demanded the fee for cremation. Taaraamti had no money and paid the fee by giving him a part of the coffin (funeral cloth).

Vishwaamitr had come to the crematorium and witnessed all that had happened. He was impressed with the patience, honesty and dutiful way in which Harishchandra and Taaraamti conducted themselves. Appearing before Harishchandra he said: "I took your kingdom because I wanted to test you. You have proved to me that you are the most truthful king on earth. As I am pleased with you I hand back the kingdom of Ayodhya". The sage applied some medicine on Rohit's wound and the boy became well again. When the crematorium keeper and the Brahmin heard of their servant's identity they expressed shock and asked for forgiveness if they had done them wrong.

Harishchandra returned to Ayodhya with his family and ruled his kingdom once again with justice, wisdom and truthfulness.

King Harishchandra always walked on the path of truth. His word was his bond. He bore much suffering in his life for the sake of truth. Like Harishchandra, we should also speak the truth and walk the part of truth, irrespective of the difficulties with which we may be confronted. Truth always triumphs. The world moves on the wheels of truth.

2. Non-Violence (Love)

Ahimsaa paramo Dharmh - The most important law of man is: You shall not kill (Mahaabhaarat)

A man who is nonviolent will never generate violence in his enemy - Yog Darshan

Gautam Buddh and Robber Angulimal

Beyond the borders of Shraavasti a robber lived in a jungle. His name was Angulimal. Angulimal not only robbed people but also murdered them. Then he cut the fingers (anguli) of the murdered and made a garland (mala) of them for himself. This is how he got his name, Angulimal. People shivered at the mention of his name and stopped living in the neighborhood.

One day Gautama Buddh went through the forest. When Angulimal saw the Buddh, he lifted his axe and ran towards him. "If you proceed further I shall kill you", he said. But Buddh, cool and collected, continued to walk. Angulimal again and sprang forward to attack. Buddh showed no signs of fear. The robber held back and began to think: "No one ever dared to pass this way alone and unarmed. What kind of man is this who comes along and without a weapon. At sight of me people tremble with fear and fall at my feet and beg for mercy. This monk shows no sign of feared."

With eyes in which there was peace and compassion Buddh looked at Angulimal. Angulimal looked into the monk's eyes and became overpowered with the spiritual strength in them. Buddh created a great impression in the robber. He was transformed. His evil desires and habits left him. He lay down his axe and fell at the Buddh's feet and asked for forgiveness. Buddh lifted Angulimal and embraced him. On the request of Angulimal Buddh accepted him as his disciple.

All the inhabitants of Shraavasti came to hear of what had transpired. Angulimal had robbed many of them, killed many of their relatives and friends. When they saw him walking behind Buddh they decided to take revenge and threw stones at him. Buddh advised Angulimal not to lose his temper but to allow the blood of sin to flow out of his body. It was a means of purification. Angulimal accepted the teachings of non-violence and did not retaliate. He became a great saint later in life.

What a wicked man was Angulimal. He murdered all who came his way. But the man could not kill Buddha. Buddha harmed nobody. He loved all. He loved the wicked Angulimal also. Angulimal raised his axe to kill him. Buddha did not show anger. Even at that moment love for the murderer shone in his eyes.

We should also try never to harm anybody. We should never be the cause of pain. Let there be love for all in our nature. Let there be malice towards none.

3. Duty towards Parents

Matari devo bhav. Pitri devo bhav - Honor thy mother and father (Upanishad)

Anuvratah pituh putro, maatraa bhavatu sammana - Children should follow in their parents' footsteps and, having become like them, serve them to the best of their ability (Atharva Ved)

Shravan Kumar (A Story from Raamayan)

Thousands of years ago there was a thick forest on the banks of the River Sarju. The Rivers Sarju flowed close to the city of Ayodhya. One night the king of Ayodhya, Dashrath, came to the forest to hunt. Dashrath was a good marksman and could shoot in the dark by merely hearing the sound of the movements of game.

Dashrath waited under a tree. He heard a gurgling sound. Thinking that an animal had come to drink from the river he let go an arrow in the direction of the sound.

A moment later there came the cry of a human being. The anxious king ran to the place from where the sound came. He found a youth who writhed with pain on the bank of the river. His arrow was stuck in the youth's heart.

The youth's name was Shrivankumar. Shravan's parents were old and blind. It was their wish to visit holy places in their last days. Shravan carried them from shrine to shrine in two baskets, which hung from slung. While on their pilgrimage the three came to the River Sarju. A little rest, a drink of water and then they would be on their way again.

With difficulty Shravan told the king about his parents who waited for him not far from the place. They were thirsty. Would the king take the pot of water to them? Then the youth collapsed and died.

Dashrath carried the pot. They said: "Son, why are you late? Where did you go?" Dashrath did not reply. Then the mother asked: 'Why don't you speak? What is wrong?'

With tears in his eyes Dashrath told them about their son's death. He was willing to take them to his palace and look after them. The old people were not interested in his offer. They only cried for their son, the mother dashed the pot of water to the ground. Then she cursed the king thus: "One day you too shall lose a son and die pining for him".

While calling the name of their son the old people put their heads on the ground and died.

Parents bring children into this world. With much pain and suffering they care for them. None should forget their sacrifice. We should serve them not only when we are young but when we are grown-ups

also. We should be humble before them and never do anything, which might hurt their feelings. Shrivankumar died serving his parents. He has become an ideal example of what a dutiful son should be.

4. Respect for Teachers

Acharya devo bhav - Honor thy teacher and serve him (Upanishad)

Vidya vinayena shobhate - Humility is the jewel of knowledge

Krishna, Sudaamaa and Muni Sandipani

Sage Sandipani ran his gurukul school in his ashram. In those days sages in India built their hermitage far from towns and cities. The pupils resided at the ashrams (hermitage).

Sandipani was a very well-known teacher. From far and wide students came to his ashram to study. Many princes also studied at his ashram. Whether a pupil was the son of a king or a pauper he was given equal treatment. All had to render services to the guru (preceptor) and the ashram. They were required to participate in the performance of the Yajnya ceremony, collect firewood, sweep the ashram, cook and wash, look after the cows and work in the gardens and orchards. They had to have faith and trust in the guru. The guru was always educated, religious and a person of high character. He was both a mother and father to the students besides being the teacher. He gave them love and protection.

In the ashram of Sandipani a prince called Krishna, son of Vasudev; studied there was also another student Sudaamaa, the son of a poor Brahmin. A great friendship grew up between Sudaamaa and Krishna. They moved about together and did their work jointly.

One day when Sandipani was away his wife who lived in the ashram ordered Krishna and Sudaamaa to bring firewood from the forest. With choppers in their hands, they went into the forest. They cut a lot of wood, as they were about to bundle there was lightning and thunder. Suddenly the day became dark and heavy rain began to fall. In the Storm, the friends lost their way.

When the guru returned to the ashram he noticed that Krishna and Sudaamaa were not there. Accompanied by older students with torches in their hands he went in Search of Krishna and Sudaamaa. The party found the two shivering and wet to the skin. They were brought to the ashram and asked to change their clothes and warm themselves by the fireside. The guru praised them for the courage and the love that they had shown towards him. The service that they had rendered to the ashram was worthy of emulation.

In this lesson, we get a good Insight of Krishna's and Sudaamaa's devotion to their teacher. Like our parents the teacher is also worthy of worship. We should obey him. By giving us education, our teachers make men of us. It is the knowledge, which we get from him that fills us with humility. Humility is the jewel of knowledge. May we never be filled with pride.

5. Forgiveness and Fearlessness

Kshama virasya bhushanam - Forgiveness is the jewel of the hero (Mahaabhaarat)

Temptation, greed and even the fear of death should not make us leave the path of righteousness -
Bhartrihari

Bold Swami Dayanand

“Can you do evil deeds, commit sins and then depend on the River Ganga (Ganges) to purify you when you dive into it? Do not believe this”. A Sannyasi thundered these words on the bank of the River Ganges. Thousands of men and women had arrived on the scene to bathe in the waters of the Ganges. A large number of them were sadhus and holy men. It was to this crowd that the bold Sannyasi addressed himself.

Some seemed to understand the Sannyasi’s teaching, but there were many who were angered by it. They threatened to harm him. But the Sannyasi was afraid of no one. This sannyasi was Swami Dayanand, the great Reformer.

Amongst those who believed in the holiness of the River Ganges was the chief of Bareilly, Rao Karansingh. He was present in the crowd. Rao Karansingh became angry when he heard Swami Dayanand. He approached him. Swami Dayanand greeted him and asked him to be seated, but in his rage, Rao Karansingh hardly heard him.

“Why do you speak ill about the Ganges River? Dayanand replied, “I do not speak ill about the Ganges nor do I pray to it.”

Karansingh – “Don’t you believe in the divine powers of the Ganges?”

Dayanand – “I believe that the Ganges is just a river and no more”.

Dayanand’s words annoyed Rao Karansingh. From his waist, he drew a sword and rushed at the Swami. Dayanand quickly got up, grabbed Karansingh’s arm and wrenched the sword from it. He broke it by pressing its point into the ground. Rao felt ashamed and hurriedly left the place.

Swami Dayanand’s friends asked him to charge Karansingh. But Dayanand said, “No Karansingh forgot the code of a Kshatriya (warrior class). How can I forget the code of a Swami? A Swami does not harm anybody. When it comes to actions or Dharm, he cannot forget truth, even if the king gets annoyed. Besides God, he fears no one”. Swami Dayanand was a fearless man.

Man should speak the truth. He should always walk on the path of truth. But only he who is fearless can be on the path. The man who is afraid tells lies. He is filled with excuses; greed and temptation also make him resort to lies. He who has faith in God never fears. Swami Dayanand was such a man. That is why he always told the truth.

6. Righteous Living

Yato Dharmas tato jayah - He who walks on the path of righteousness always triumphs (Mahaabhaarat)

Dharmo rakshati rakshitah - Those who are close to righteousness are protected by righteousness (Manu Smriti)

Magha and the Elephant (A story from Buddhist literature)

The king of Magadha was always indulging in pleasures. He gave no attention to the administration of the country. He was interested in the amount of money that comes into the treasury. The civil servants

took advantage of the situation and stooped to corruption and bribery. The masses became indolent and spent most of their time in gambling and drinking.

There lived in one of the districts in Magadha a youth whose name was Magha. He was a simple and kind fellow. He derived great pleasure in doing service to the people. He swept the roads and pathways and saw to the needs of the sick. If a bullock cart got stuck in a ditch he pushed it out. If he saw a dead animal he made suitable arrangements for its disposal.

The people made fun of Magha and called him a fool. They tried to be an obstruction in his good work. But Magha undaunted, continued with his humanitarian work.

Gradually the public's opinion about Magha changed. The youths became impressed with his service. One by one they came to give him assistance. Magha formed a society and the youth became its members. In the name of the society they began to render assistance whenever it was required. Magha made five rules to be observed by the members of his society. They were (1) there must be no violence. (2) No one must steal. (3) No one must tell lies. (4) Women should be respected. (5) No one should take liquor.

The whole district was impressed with the good work of Magha and his society. Slowly the people started to reform. They no longer fought amongst themselves or stole. They stopped drinking. Magha's reforms didn't please the governor of the district. Welfare work of Magha had affected his revenue because fewer fines were paid. The governor went to the king and complained that Magha was a traitor who incited the people not to pay taxes. The treasury had become empty. On hearing the complaint, the king became angry. He ordered that Magha and his friends be trampled by an elephant. Magha remained calm and silent. He had faith in truth and righteousness. He addressed his friends thus, "with firm conviction and devotion we have done our work. We have to die one day. Therefore, all of you get ready to receive cheerfully the punishment imposed by the king. Bear no malice or hatred against the king or the elephant"

Magha and five of his companions were made to lie on the ground. The mahout drove the elephant forward. The elephant came as far as Magha and stopped. The mahout tried his best to drive the elephant over the body of Magha and his companions but the elephant would not move forward. The king was astonished.

He ordered the elephant to go back and asked Magha to explain. Magha told him about the way he had reformed the people. The king felt highly pleased with the service that Magha and his society were rendering. He praised him for the noble work that he was doing with courage and sincerity.

Appendix

Word by word meaning of Prayer Mantrs (to follow soon)