

Dharma

Dharma is a unique Vedic statement with immense hidden meaning. The word Dharm is derived from the root Dhru – which means that supports, protects, sustains, holds, – “Dhrayathe yat dharmaha”.

Dharma is that principal which protects sustains the cosmic law and order. There is no single equivalent English word, which justifies the full and complete meaning of Dharma. So a combination or a set of words are used to explain it. Righteousness, Morality, Religion, Sathyam, Charity, Character, Law abiding, Duty bound, Luck, Punyam, Swabhavam (abiding in real nature) etc.

Dharma has to be understood according to the context in which it is used

1. Dharma is the first of four Purusharthas (human goals): Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha. The Artha (security) and Kama (Entertainment) are the goals for experiencing in this life. Dharma in this context is called Punyam and it is a goal for the next life. According to Law of Karma, every action invariably produces a result (Phalam) – either favorable or unfavorable. The Karma Phalam thus generated can be experienced partly or wholly in this life or carried forward to the next life. The Phalam that is experienced in this life is called Drista Phalam (visible result). If it is favorable result, then it is sukam and if it is unfavorable, then it is Dhukkam. The Phalam that is generated but not experienced in this life is transferred to the next life. This is called Adhrista Phalam (Invisible result). The results of noble activities of this life are accumulated to be experienced in the next life are registered as Punyam. Similarly the results of evil activities of this life

are carried to the next life as Papam. This concept is very important for Hindus who believe in Punarjanma.

“Arthae Gruhe nivartante Smasane mitra bhadhavaah

Sukrutham Dhuskrutham chiva Gaccantham anu gacchathi”

“At the time of death, all wealth is left at home.

Only thing that the departed carries with him is the Punyam and Papam one accumulates in this life”

So the accumulation of punyam in this life is the goal of dharma purushartha.

2. Dharma maintains and protects universal harmony. Whenever Dharma declines and Adharma escalates, the cosmic harmony suffers. Unless the Universal harmony is re-established, serious consequences ensue.

The process of establishing dharma is two fold:

1. Parithranaya Sadhunam (Sista Rakshana) – By promoting dharmic population by spreading values through teaching.
2. Vinasaya Dhuskrutham (Dusta Sikshana) – Converting the adharmic people to dharmic people through teaching if that fails to eliminate them.

By the above two methods dharma is re-established. Lord Krishna accomplished these goals by giving out Gita and also by eliminating the wicked.

Is Life Predetermined?

Many events of our life are out of our control and most of our life appears to be predetermined. It appears that we may be able to influence only a small portion of our life. Our birth is destined. Our death is destined. And most of our life appears destined. Then, is it correct to say that our life is destined and we can do nothing to change our destiny?

I had the privilege of meeting the Swami Paramarthananda in August 2016 and at that time I presented this question to him.

Before I present the answer from the Swamiji, some discussions regarding the laws of karma. Karmas can be classified, based on their occurrence, into three types:

1. **Sanjitha Karma:** Sanjitha karma is the sum total of all karma accumulated from our previous jenmas (lives). Sanjitha karmas will mature over many jenmas (births/lives).
2. **Agami Karma:** Agami Karmas are generated by our actions in this life. Some agami karma will mature in this life and some will become sanjitha karma for maturity in later lives.
3. **Prarabtha Karma:** Prarabtha karma is the karma maturing or fructifying in this life. Maturing karma could be either from this life or from previous lives.

Some of the laws of karma:

1. Some of the prarabtha karma are from this life and others are from previous lives. Maturity or fructifications of Karmas is not linear. This is similar to seeds of plants – some seeds sprout quickly while others take longer.
2. Karma includes both punyam (positive karmas) and pavam (negative karmas). Punyams are the result of our dharmic actions and pavams are the result of our

adharmic actions.

3. While I do not control what has happened in my prior lives (sanjitha karma) or what is happening in this life (prarabtha karma), I can control how I react to my current situation (agami karma). A dharmic and purposeful life can increase punyam or decrease pavam.
4. All karmas – sanjitha, prarabtha and agami karmas- are the results of my actions in this life and previous lives. I did have control over any and all of my actions of my previous lives. I do have control over any and all of my actions in this life. I and I alone created all of my karmas. While my adharmic choices in the past have resulted in current unfavorable situations, I should make dharmic choices here and now. I can't change the choices I have made in the past, but I do have the free will to make the correct choices now.
5. When prarabtha karma for this life is exhausted, the body falls.
6. When sanjitha karma is exhausted, we get moksha or liberated.

Swamiji stated that some of the prarabtha karma are parapalam and some are dhurpalam, that is they are weak and controllable or strong and non controllable. However, we do not know which ones we can control and which ones we can not control. So we must always exercise our free will and make dharmic choices. We may also be able to reduce the impact of the controllable prarabtha karma by doing prayachitham (remedial measures). Prayachithams are of two types:

1. Lowkika prayachitham: These are worldly activities we can perform. Example of a lowkika prayachitham is going to a doctor when getting ill.
2. Sasthrika prayachitham: These are the rituals mentioned in scriptures. If these rituals are performed as described in the scriptures, the impact of prarabtha

karma can be reduced or eliminated.

When we face any adverse situation we should always do our dharmic duty and take proper prayachitham – either lowkika prayahitham or sasthrika pryachitham. For example, when one gets seriously ill, one should seek the treatment from a doctor. Refusing to follow medical advice and accepting the medical condition as our destiny is fatalism. Our scriptures do not allow fatalism and fatalism is fundamentally against the duties of a human being. Bagawan Krishna has emphasized this many times in Bagawat Geeta.

In conclusion, we always have free will and that free will gives us control over Agami Karma. A dharmic life can reduce agami karma pavam. We can also do some prayaschitham for prarabtha Karma to mitigate a negative phalam.

Notes:

- This post is based on my meeting with Swamiji in August 2016 as well many of his classes, specifically his classes in Tatva Bodha and his class number 148 – Chapter 10, Verse 33 of Bagawat Gita. I also recommend the readers to listen to those classes and get their own perspective (this post is from my perspective).
- I thank Ram Ramaswamy for framing this question in logical way. Many parts of this post are borrowed from his original question, which is reproduced below:

To exhaust Prarabhda karma one gets rebirth. This is destiny. While living, one experiences prarabhdha karma phalam, this too is destiny. Once Prarabhda Karma is exhausted for this lifetime, the body falls. This is also destiny.

Agami Karma's are new karmas generated by our actions in this lifetime. Some Agami Karma phalam will occur in this lifetime itself. Others will become Sanchitha Karma that will come back in a later life.

We do have some control on Agami Karma or so it appears. A purposeful life can reduce agami karma. We can also do some Prayaschitham for Prarabhdha Karma as well to mitigate a negative phalam.

Looks like there is an only a small portion that we can influence. Most of our life appears destined. Our birth is destined. Our death is destined. Some parts of our life are also destined; we just do not know which part.

Is it then correct to say that based upon the part (Small) we do not control, our life is not destined? Even Ramana Maharishi told his mother: What has to happen will happen. What should not happen will not happen, however much we try. Is this not destiny?