

DOCTRINE OF KARMA AND ETHICAL SCIENCE

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Introduction: It is the **Spirit** that is life, and that thinks, and feels, and observes, that is the "I" in each one of us. The Spirit is one and the same in everybody and in everything. But **Matter** cannot think, or feel, or observe; it is without consciousness. It has also the tendency to be constantly dividing itself into many forms and to become many. These are some very important differences between **Spirit and Matter**, as well as the differences that the **Senses**, when completely developed, can perceive Matter, while they cannot perceive Spirit, and that Matter takes form while Spirit is formless. So, the Spirit and Matter are said to be the opposite's one of the other; Spirit is called the **Knower**, the one that knows, while Matter is called the object of knowledge, that which is **Known**. We should try to understand these differences, and must never confuse Spirit and Matter; they are opposites, the first "pair of opposites," out of which a universe is built up. "A stone does not move of itself." But science tells us that every particle in those stone particles too small for us to see is moving rapidly and regularly to and fro, is vibrating, to use the scientific term.

Karma: is a Sanskrit word which means **action**, but it is generally used to mean a certain definite connection between what is being done now and what will happen in the future. Things do not happen by accident, by chance, in a disorderly way. They happen in regular succession; they follow each other in a regular order. If a seed is planted in the ground, it sends up a little stem, and leaves grow on the stem and the flowers come, and then fruits, and in the fruits are seeds again. One of these seeds planted will produce a stem, leaves, flowers, fruits and seeds. The same sort of seed produces the same kind of plants. Rice produces rice plants; barley produces barley; wheat produces wheat; thistle produces thistle; cactus produces cactus. If a man sows thistle, he must not expect a crop of sweet grapes; if he plants prickly cactus, he must not expect to gather juicy apples. This is karma, and a man, knowing it, sows the seed of the thing he wants to reap. This is the first thing to remember.

An **action** is not quite so simple a thing as it looks. If we ask a person, "Why do you walk into the town?" he may say, "I wanted a pair of shoes, and thought I could get them there;" or, "I wanted to see a friend and I thought he was in the town; and so on, in many ways, but always: **wanted and thought** therefore I acted." These three are always found together.

Now a **want** is what is called a **desire**; we desire to get something that is the **first stage**; then we **think** how to get it, that is the **second stage**; then we **act** so as to get it that is the **third stage**. This is the regular order; every action has a thought behind it and every thought has a desire behind it. These three things action, thought, desire are the three threads that are twisted into the cord of karma. Our actions make the people round us happy or unhappy; if we make them happy, we have sown happiness like a seed, and it grows up into happiness for ourselves; if we make them unhappy, we have sown unhappiness like a seed, and it grows up into unhappiness for ourselves. If we do cruel things, we sow cruelty like a seed, and it grows up into cruelty to ourselves. If we do kind things, we sow kindness like a seed, and it grows up into kindness to ourselves. Whatever we sow by our actions comes back to us. This is karma but action has thought behind it. Now thought makes what is called our **character**, the nature and kind of mind that we have. As we think about a thing a great deal, our mind becomes like that

thing. If we think kindly, we become kind; if we think cruelly, we become cruel; if we think deceitfully, we become deceitful; if we think honestly, we become honest. In this way our character is made by our thoughts, and when we are born again, we shall be born with the character that is being made, by our thoughts now. As we act according to our nature, or character as a kind person acts kindly, or a cruel person acts cruelly it is easy to see that actions in our next life will depend on the thoughts of our present life. **This is karma.**

Types of Karma:

Sanchita Karma: It is the sum total of the accumulated Karma of previous lives. It is the burden of our past and needs to be exhausted in our spiritual journey.

Prarabda Karma: It is that part of the Sanchita Karma which is currently activated in our present life and which influences the course of our present actions. Depending on the nature of our present actions, we are either exhausting it or creating more Karmic burden for ourselves.

Agami Karma: It is the Karma that arises out of our current life activities. We will experience the consequences of it in the coming lives. In fact, it is added to the Sanchita Karma.

Kriyamana

Karma: This is the Karma whose consequences will be experienced by us in the near or distant future in our current life.

Sequence of Karma Phal: The sequence in which we will experience the Karma Phal will not be known to anyone except the Lord. We can not expect to make a donation, go home and look forward to receiving the benefits for the good actions we have done.

Finally the idea of "offering sacrifices" is very familiar in India, but we need to understand the principle which underlies all sacrifices, so that we may realize that every one should sacrifice himself to the good of others, and that all sacrifice of other things are meant, to teach a man how he ought, at last, to sacrifice himself. In fact, creation is sacrifice; it is the pouring out of life for the benefit of others.

The Three Debts: Vedic Dharma (VD) teaches us to do right by explaining to us the three debts that we owe; the debt to the Rishis, paid chiefly in the **Brahmacharya Ashrama**, by study and by service of the teacher; the debt to the Ancestors, paid chiefly in the **Garhasthya Ashrama**, by rearing a family and by charity; the debt to the Devas, paid chiefly in the **Vanaprastha Ashrama**, by sacrifice and meditation. A debt is something we owe; we have received and should repay. This payment of debt, of what is due, is called the discharge of duty, that which we owe to others, which we ought to do. The discharge of a duty is called a **virtue**; the non-discharge of a duty is called a **vice**. A virtuous man recognizes his duties, his obligations, and fulfills them; a vicious man does not recognize nor fulfills them.

Ancient Caste System: Manu laid down four distinctly marked castes which are recognized in the social polity. The **first** includes the lower social stratum; they are laborers, artisans, servants, manual workers of every kind. In the social polity of the VD, they were called **Shudras**. The **second** includes the commercial class, the traders, and the organizers of industry, the capitalists, bankers, the managers of large industrial concerns. In the social polity of the VD, they were called **Vaishyas**, and were trained in it gradually to see as aim the common good and the general prosperity, instead of mere personal aggrandizement. The **third** includes the nation, and one is called to legislate, to rule, to work unselfishly for the State, and to use his power to protect and to regulate, not to aggrandize himself. This includes kings, judges, legislators, warriors, all who rule and keep order in the State. In the social polity of the VD, such mature were called the **Kshatriya**, and bore the burden of kingship and of fighting for the national defense. The **fourth** includes the priests, the counselors, and the teachers of every kind, authors,

scientists, poets and philosophers. In the social polity of the VD, such persons were called **Brahmanas**, the advanced and unselfish ones who gave much and needed little.

Evil of Caste confusion in India has grown from men of each caste grasping at the work of the other castes, and from each thinking more of the rights his caste gives him than of the duties it imposes. Naturally this attitude has provoked opposition, and antagonisms have replaced mutual service and good will. Hence caste has become a source of social bitterness, instead of a framework maintaining all in happy order.

Ethical Science: is that each one of us should feel for other selves as for himself, should feel himself to be the same as, or at least similar to, other selves and, so feeling, we must always tell the truth, because to tell a falsehood to another is to regard him with distrust, to regard him as separate from, or even opposed to oneself, to prevent him from sharing with oneself in a common knowledge, which should be the same for all when all are as one. From the setting up of this separation by untruthfulness, consciously or unconsciously, endless harm results and vices arise. This description of the nature of virtues as forms of Truth corresponds again with our standard of Ethics, for truthfulness promotes union, while untruthfulness increases separateness. Truthfulness has always been a marked characteristic of the noble characters described in Vedic literature.

In order to aim at ruling our mind; if it runs to evil things let us call it back; let us allow it to fix itself only on good things. This is the **first**, the most difficult, the most essential part of self-control. The control of speech is the **second** step; we must think before we speak. Hasty speech leads us into endless troubles. **Thirdly**, the physical body must be controlled, and not be allowed to hurry us into sin for its gratification. Youth is the time for conquering the body, for it is then most easily subdued, and set in the right way. For the body is a creature of habit and though at first, it will oppose the will of the inner conscience with great energy, a little perseverance makes it give way, and then it goes as contentedly and readily along the new road as it did along the old. Among the sources of evil and of sorrow that we should strive to get rid of by this self-control is selfish desire, for out of the insatiable desire for material wealth and material pleasures grow many miseries, and peace arises from the absence of these desires and not by their continued gratification.

He that desires happiness must renounce desire. Of these two the one who gets all that he wishes and the one who casts off every wish the latter, who renounces all, is surely much superior to the former, for none can ever attain to the end of all desires. Desire may not be quenched by enjoyment of its objects; it only increases manifold therewith, as fire with libations of butter. We should injure nothing. Our life should be a source of help, not of harm. The control of the body includes this abstention from injuring others. That man, who practices the religion of universal compassion, achieves the highest good. One should never do that to another which one regards as injurious to one's own self. This, in brief, is the rule of righteousness. People often harm others in more thoughtlessness, and so bring about much trouble. What is the consequence? A smoldering fire of repulsion and dislike that later can grow into a blazing fire of hate. It is true that unless the combustibles are there, the spark will not kindle the fuel; unless the tissues are tainted, the microbe will not develop the disease ; still it is our duty to guard against such a destructive spark, such a death-bringing microbe, as long and as carefully as we can. When thoughtless exercise of strength hurts the weak who cannot retaliate, then the anger, that is born but is not vented, becomes transformed into what is contemptuously called hate and

malice, but is in reality far less to blame than the careless spoliation of the weaker by the stronger. To the superficial eye of one who is himself equally inclined in his secret mind to oppression, such acts may appear blameless or even magnificent. But to the just eye of a true chivalry they will always appear in their real character of meanness and tyranny. And he who studies the Great Indian History carefully knows well that the **Pandavas** were not all to praise, nor the **Kauravas** all to blame. The triple control of mind, speech and body results in righteousness, in right character expressing itself in right conduct. The man who has thus put himself into right relations with the things nearest to him, his own emotions, mind and body, and has thus partially acquired the virtues classified as self-regarding or egoistic.

Virtues and Vices: We have now to study the virtues and vices which arise in the relations between human beings. These are best classified under three heads:

1. **The virtues and vices which arise in relation to superiors:** Love which is unselfish prompts us to make sacrifices for others, and to restrain ourselves for the common good; therefore, such love is the root of virtues, of the qualities that promote union. So also hate prompts us to take from others, to grasp at all desirable things for our own separate enjoyment to the injury of others; therefore, hate is the root of vices, of the qualities that promote separateness. Moreover, when we make a sacrifice for one, we love, we feel happiness in making it, and we thus learn that the deepest happiness, real bliss, lies in giving, which is the joy of the **Jivatma**, and not in taking, which is the joy of the **Bodies**. Let us see how love impels a man to act in relation to his superiors, to those to whom he looks up. A man's superiors are: God, Sovereign, Parents, Teachers, and the Aged. Reverence to the Aged fitly closes the list of virtues which should flower when we come into relation with our superiors, and it was one of the marked characteristics of the ancient Vedic character. The wisdom which is the fruit of long experience is the precious treasure in possession of the Aged, and they willingly pour this forth for the benefit of the teachable, courteous, respectful youth. In the hurry of modern life, this respect for the Aged is apt to be trampled under foot, and it is necessary that care should be taken to cultivate it. He, who habitually salutes and constantly pays reverence to the Aged, obtains **an increase of four things: length of life, knowledge, fame and strength.**

2. **The virtues and vices which arise in relation to equals:** The man that ever wounds the vitals of others, harsh, and sharp of speech, ever piercing other men with the thorns of evil words, he is the man most abandoned of fortune, and ever bearish, bound to his mouth, an evil demon. They are verily arrows, these evil words that issue from the mouth; he who is wounded by them sorrowed night and day, for they wound the vitals. The wise man unloosed not such (shafts) at others. There are no riches in the worlds like compassion, friendliness to all beings, charity and sweet speech. Therefore, ever speak gently and never harshly; honor the worthy; give, but ask not.

3. **The virtues and vices which arise in relation to inferiors:** As we go more and more into the world, we come across many people who are much younger than ourselves, people of the next or of later generations, people also who are less educated, or who are poorer, or below us in social rank, with such people, inferior to ourselves in some special point or generally, we enter into relations, and we need to know what virtues we should cultivate, what vices we should avoid, if our relations with them are to be harmonious. The first and most obvious of these relations is that with our youngsters, and the best examples of the necessary virtues are seen in the relations of parents to their children. Tenderness, Compassion, Gentleness, Kindness, how

strongly these virtues shine out in loving parents, and how happy they make the home. Father and mothers love their children, suffer in their sufferings, and are glad in their pleasures, feel sympathy with them in everything.

In view of above we have a clear and simple classification of the virtues which make our relations with all around us harmonious, and seeing them distinctly, we can strive to attain them. And we shall also see plainly the vices which make disharmony and can try to avoid them. All the virtues have their root in pure Love, and have Bliss for their Fruit; all the vices have their root in personal Hate, and their fruit is Misery. Forgiveness, self-possession, harmlessness, equability, truthfulness, straightforwardness, the conquest of the senses, skill, gentleness, modesty, purity, restfulness, absence of scorn, jealousy and excitement, sweet speech, truth-speaking, refraining from theft and harmlessness of all is **self-control**. Self-possession, patience, self-control, integrity, purity, restraint, intelligence, learning, truthfulness, and absence of anger, these ten are the marks of Vedic Dharma.

Ethics of Conservation: During the Vedic period, the importance of maintaining the man-nature balance appears to be the dominant thought in our scriptures. Conservation ethics also places emphasis on the equitable sharing of the benefits of natural resources.

“Wealth should be equitably distributed among all people. And for that matter one must treat all persons as being the same as one’s own self.” A special mention about Maharshi Veda Vyasa and his contribution to Vedic literature must be made who wrote all the 18 Puranas and the 18 Upa-Puranas. He has organized and arranged the Vedas into four Vedas that we see today – **Rig, Yajur, Sama and Atharva Veda**.

According to **Upanishads**, resources must be utilized to create wealth. Excessive exploitation of the Earth must be forbidden. It says:

“Wealth must not be despised – that should be the vow

Wealth must not be wasted - that should be the duty

Wealth must be developed manifold – that should be the determination

The Earth should be treated as a wealth by itself “

“You should nurture yourself with only that portion of resources which has been showered upon you. Must not covet anything more than that, for after all to whom do these natural endowments really belong to?”

It is in **Kena Upanishad** that we find the famous words

“He who thinks he does not know it - knows it.

He who thinks he knows it - does not know it.”

“The true knower’s think they can never know it (because of it is infinitude), while the ignorant think they know it. Those who know do not speak; those who speak do not know.”

Conclusion: We have finally to see how a virtue helps to produce a virtue in another, and a vice a vice, so that we may learn how to help others to tightness of thought and action, and thus promote their happiness. By showing love to others, we awaken love in them; by showing hate, we awaken hate. We are apt to feel as others feel. A man who is angry makes those around him angry, and so quarrels arise and grow more and bitter. An angry word brings an angry reply, and that brings a still more angry retort, and so on and on. On the other hand, gentle words bring gentle words in reply, kindness arouses kindness, and good deeds invoke good deeds in others. When this is understood, we can use right emotions to counteract wrong ones in others, instead of letting ourselves run into wrong emotions when these are shown to us. If a man speaks angrily to us, and we feel inclined to answer angrily, we should check ourselves and answer very gently, and this gentle answer will soothe him, and make him feel less angry. This is what is meant by returning well for evil and only by acting in this way can we restore harmony when it is disturbed, and preserve it for the happiness of all.

Four Golden Acts in Life:

1. Look Back and Get Experience.
2. Look Forward and See Hope.
3. Look Around and Accept Reality.
4. Look Within and Find Yourself.

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