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Chapter 9
Dharma and the Growth of an Individual
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1 Introduction, Objectives, and Limitations

It is a well recognized fact that the central aim of any socio–economic policy must be to enhance the happiness and well–being of the individuals in the society. In 1972, Bhutan's King Jigme Singye Wangchuck proposed the concept of "Gross National Happiness", which serves as a unifying vision for Bhutan's five-year planning process and all the derived planning documents that guide the economic and development plans of the country [Wikipedia, 2012]. Clearly, happiness is a highly nuanced and subjective notion, and often conflicts with the equally highly nuanced and subjective notion of what is good for the individual, let alone the conflict between the individual and the society.

One of the main objectives of this chapter is to describe my intuitive understanding about what Hindu philosophy, more precisely, dharmashastra, has to offer for the growth of an individual in harmony with the society in which he lives. The focus of this chapter is on the individual. However, at the suggestion of the referees and Dr. Vinod, I will make a few remarks about the relationship of dharmashastra and socio–economic policies in Section 6.

In private conversations with people and a casual reading of internet newspapers, I get the feeling that there is a lot of confusion about the terminology of dharmashastra. Many terms used to be understood intuitively in the generations past, but apparently, not by modern educated people. Therefore, the second main objective of this chapter is to make an effort to clarify certain terminology, as I interpret it intuitively in accordance with tradition. In Table 6.0.1, I will list some words and their common translations. However, I do not necessarily agree with these translations, and in fact, feel that some of these translations have given rise to a great deal of confusion. The reader is urged to treat the technical words in this essay in the sense in which I have defined them. This chapter might be misunderstood completely, if the reader interprets the words according to his own pre–formed ideas.

1.1 Growth of an Individual

The term growth can only be interpreted in terms of what one wants to achieve. For a child, it is typically physical growth, which the child often associates with mental and intellectual growth. For an adult, it could mean the increasing fulfillment of many other desires (e.g., career development, wealth accumulation, etc.). In each case, it is safe to say that all these desires stem from the more fundamental desire to be happy all the time. Dharmashastra goes deep into what constitutes happiness, including various shades of desires and happiness or otherwise, who exactly it is that becomes happy or sad, etc. Thus, dharmashastra is intimately involved in defining the goals of an individual, and ways to achieve a robust growth toward these goals.

1.2 Basic Terminology

The Sanskrit word **dharma** comes from the root dhru, meaning to hold. Our understanding of the term spans the entire continuum from the fundamental scientific principles that enable the whole universe (and others, as physicists are now discovering) to exist and function properly to the etiquettes of the society specific to different times and places (e.g., who should bow to whom, how, and when).

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Physical sciences explore the scientific principles behind observable phenomena. Mathematics deals with principles underlying subtler patterns of intellectual constructs. All these are parts of dharma. The science called **dharmashastra** goes beyond intellectual constructs. It seeks the "ultimate reality," explores the techniques for obtaining a direct experience of the same at a level much deeper than mental/intellectual, and examines how this experience can enrich the quality of our lives. Just as the methodology and standards of mathematics are quite different from those of biology, dharmashastra has its own methodology and standards, which are not the same as those in the physical sciences. In order to study dharmashastra, one has to observe with deep introspection one's own body, mind, and intellect, and their interactions with the rest of the world. There is no question of a blind belief in some divine revelation here.

Within the context of dharmashastra, dharma means the innate tendencies of an individual and his or her natural duties (I will explain these later). Combined with another word, the word dharma denotes the duties of all those who are so qualified. For example, when combined with the Sanskrit word putra, meaning son, the word putradharma means our rights and duties toward our parents.

The term dharma has been translated variously as Hinduism, religion, or Hindu religion. The common Western understanding of the word religion as given by Merriam-Webster is a belief in and reverence for a supernatural power accepted as the creator and governor of the universe. Clearly, dharma is not the same as religion. Similarly, the word dharmashastra has been translated as meaning science of religion, Hindu philosophy, or Indian philosophy. The common Western understanding of the term philosophy is set forth by Merriam-Webster as a logical and critical study of the source and nature of human knowledge. The science called dharmashastra seeks to go beyond logic and human intellect. It is an experimental science, not a body of speculations, with our body/mind/intellect as an essential laboratory component.

To me, the term **Hindu** denotes a community label, although the community itself is not very well-defined. I wish to impress upon the readers that the laws and methods of dharmashastra are applicable to everyone, regardless of his or her community or religious label, and regardless of whether he or she understands or believes in them.

Because it is difficult to overcome the meaning of words driven into our subconscious, I will use the original Sanskrit words whenever I find the translations misleading. A list of these is included at the end of the chapter. The reader is urged to treat these words as technical ones to be understood in the sense I have ascribed to them. A superimposition of prior beliefs will distort the thoughts I am trying to convey.

1.3   About Ancient Scriptures

This chapter will merely touch upon several topics, and an interested reader will need to look up other books, often called Hindu scriptures, to get the details. Because many experts express all kinds of scholarly critical opinions about the ancient scriptures, I find it worthwhile to make some observations about how a layman views them.

To avoid confusion with the emotional meaning attached by the Christians to the term scripture, I will use deliberately the term **dharmagrantha** (with the English plural **dharmagranthas**). The term dharmagrantha does not refer to a prespecified set of books. It is a generic term, similar to the term research monograph, referring to any document that records spiritual truths/observations/experiments in accordance with dharmashastra. It is traditional to consider three sets of documents (*prasthantrayi*) to be the foundations of the dharmashastra: *Upanishads, Brahmasutras, and the Bhagwadgeeta* ([Tilak, 1963, p. 11]). There is absolutely no specific command in any of these of the kind "Thou shalt not eat beef." They are more in the nature of describing the eternal laws as the sages found them. In addition, there are such dharmagranthas as *puranas*, which are efforts to popularize dharmashastra, provide "case studies," and record the then-prevalent ideas about the world, history, etc. There are also several additional dharmagranthas to provide specific commands of the kind I mentioned above. Obviously, not all of these are to be taken as eternal laws.

In contrast to other disciplines, and perhaps, religious scriptures, a study of dharmagranthas poses some unique problems.

We will see later that the sages were trying to describe something that cannot be described. Therefore, they resorted to all kinds of imagery and codifications. It is difficult for a modern reader to understand these images, which might have been obvious to the contemporaries of the sages. There are also many later additions, which might blend with the dharmagranthas, but might be inconsistent with the original intent.

Some of the codification and mystery is intentional. In an effort to help everyone at whatever spiritual state he or she is in, the dharmagranthas mix historical facts, ideas about the world, and deep spiritual experiences and truths, sometimes allegorically and sometimes apparently out of context. So, the dharmagranthas do not have a unique meaning for everyone who reads them. Just as a mathematical theorem can find a new meaning in totally new applications that the mathematician discovering the theorem could not possibly dream about, the

dharmagranthas have been interpreted in many novel ways. This is also the reason behind their power to inspire and guide generations of people for thousands of years.

Finally, the dharmagranthas are not reports on experiments about an external object, but rather those with our own minds and intellects. These also happen to be our primary tools for understanding anything. So, in summary, the study of our dharmagranthas is a delicate matter.

As with every other science, there is a traditional way to understand the dharmagranthas. With reverence and faith, one can reach the grains of truth hidden behind the husk of words. By this, I am thinking of the attitude that a good, well-mannered beginning graduate student of mathematics would bring to the study of his adviser's paper. He might not understand right away the whole project and the relevance of this paper like a "berry on his palm." Nevertheless, he reads the paper diligently, working out all the details, and with an enthusiasm to improve upon the results. He rereads and thinks deeply until he can distinguish the forest from the trees. Even if he finds a counterexample, his first instinct is to make very sure that he has not missed some detail, or has not made a mistake in his own arguments. In our study of the dharmagranthas, we have to take this attitude a bit further. Unlike mathematics, dharmagranthas are not to be understood at an intellectual level, but rather at a much deeper intuitive level. The deeper meaning, appropriate to the circumstances of each reader, is revealed in deep meditation. At the same time, not everything in the dharmagranthas has a deep meaning. It takes training to figure out what to pay attention to and what to ignore. A Westernized, critical, and judgmental reading is too crude a tool for this purpose. It either keeps turning the husk around, or worse, burns both the husk and the grain.

2 Some Axioms and Immediate Corollaries

I will now list some "axioms" of dharmashastra. They are based on mundane daily observations. It is as ridiculous to expect any scientific evidence for these as it is to expect such evidence for certain mathematical facts such as Zorn's lemma. Dharmashastra is a subject in its own right, with its own methodology and standards. Just as consistent systems of analysis exist assuming that Zorn's lemma is not valid; there are some sages who make contrary assumptions. In any case, I could not make a logical argument for or against them from more fundamental principles. Therefore, rather than saying derisively that there is not a shred of scientific evidence to support these, I call them axioms.

2.1 Axiom of Existence of Immutable and Permanent "Brahman"

Everything in the universe seems to be constantly changing, including our own bodies, minds, and intellects. Still, it is observed that we remember experiences from our childhood as our own. Also, other people and objects change their appearance and form, but we can clearly think of their uninterrupted existence. This axiom states that there exists something immutable and permanent that supports this continuous experience of the ever-changing universe (*upadanakarana*). This something is referred to as the **Brahman** (or **Parabrahman**).

Whenever there are two objects, it is theoretically possible for one to convert into another. While it is not theoretically impossible to postulate several objects that are all immutable, it seems to me to be logically simpler to assume that Brahman is unique. Indeed, Brahman cannot be an object in this universe. The very starting observation that gives rise to this axiom is that every object in this universe is likely to change its form. In addition, Brahman cannot have any property at all. When we prescribe any property, we are automatically prescribing a complementary property. If Brahman had properties, then it would be theoretically possible for it to assume these complementary properties instead, again violating the definition regarding its immutability and permanence. So, it is not really possible to talk about Brahman in concrete terms. Saints and sages have talked about it somewhat reluctantly, but caution us that this description is often, by its very nature, misleading; this is something one can only experience intuitively. Kenopanishad states that one who says that he has known it, knows not; one who knows cannot know that he does know ([Belsare, 1999, p. 65]).

Being the ultimate kernel of existence of everything in the universe, Brahman must necessarily manifest itself also in the individual. In this form, it is called **atman**. The exact connections among Brahman, atman, and the rest of the universe are a matter of debate among different sages, giving rise to different systems of thought: *advaita* (nonduality), *dvaita* (duality), *shuddhadvaita* (pure duality), *chidwilaswad* (world as manifestation/play of an aspect of Brahman), etc. I found most logically satisfactory the advaita viewpoint that Brahman alone exists in reality; the rest of the universe has no real existence. This eliminates the question about why the universe came into existence. Of course, one cannot deny the deeply felt fact that the universe exists, and so do I, and we are different. In advaita, this phenomenon is referred to as **maayaa**.

Within the framework of maayaa, the pure atman is apparently imprisoned behind several walls (**kosha**s), similar to a cocoon. The atman when so imprisoned is called **jeevatma**. The Brahman in this context is called **paramatma**. While we are still under the spell of maayaa; we really do not have any direct experience of the oneness or otherwise of the jeevatma and paramatma. Therefore, from a practical point of view, we need not discuss the differences among the various systems of thought on this issue.

2.2 Axiom of the Law of Karma and Reincarnation

This axiom states that every action (**karma**) has an effect (called **fruit**) on its performer. This axiom is also a codification of our everyday experiences. Without this assumption, we cannot even begin to plan any course of action, howsoever mundane. There are some apparent counterexamples. A German friend remarked to me that in his opinion, Hitler did not suffer any consequences of his actions. This doubt comes from the identification of Hitler with his body. A concurrent law, which must be logically true if one assumes the law of karma, is the *axiom of reincarnation (or rebirth)*. The fruits of action do not necessarily accrue to the body. The body is only one of the tools for performing actions and obtaining experiences. The jeevatma is the one who experiences pleasure, pain, and desire, and accordingly instructs the intelligence to start the chain of commands resulting in different actions. So, it is the one who needs to reap the fruits of the actions. If it does not experience these fruits in its current body, it has to assume a new body upon the death of the current one so as to continue its experience. The experience of the fruit is also a karma, with its own fruit, and the cycle continues as long as the jeevatma does not shed its koshas and attain its original unity with the Brahman.

For example, suppose that Hitler has caused someone to be tortured, say John Doe, who hates Hitler as a result. As a fruit of this karma, in their new births, Hitler becomes an animal owned by the previous John Doe, who has now become a farmer. Neither of them has any memory of their previous births. Because the question of whether animals accrue new karma by their actions is irrelevant to this chapter, let us assume that Hitler is now just reaping the fruit of his actions, without performing new karma. The mental karma of farmer John predisposes him to torture the animal Hitler. Being human with a free will, John will be performing new karmas either by succumbing to his predispositions or by struggling and overcoming them ([Yogananda, 2001, p. 976]).

Similarly, the axiom of karma does not state that everything that happens to us is a result of our own individual karma in some past life. Nevertheless, it is good for us to believe so, because it prevents us from committing such new karmas as harboring hatred, and also motivates us to make appropriate new karmas to counteract undesirable effects, rather than succumbing lazily to fate. However, when we encounter someone unfortunate whom we could help, it is illogical to do nothing, arguing that he is only reaping the fruit of his own actions. He might well be, but we are creating a new karma for ourselves. Thus, if John Doe imagines that his torture is the result of his own karma rather than that of Hitler, he would nip in the bud the hatred and the possible seeds of bad karma in the next birth. Even if he cannot do so, he can still struggle in his next life to overcome his predispositions and treat the animal Hitler kindly, thereby preventing further bad karmas on his own part.

It is evident that we feel happy when our desires are fulfilled, and not otherwise. The very idea of happiness and a contrary state of mind rests on the assumption that the one who experiences these mental states is different from the rest of the universe. Once the jeevatma and paramatma become united in their original state, there is no further universe to speak of. The duality between happiness and its contrary state, indeed even the duality between a feeling and the one who feels it, disappears. One achieves a state of perfect bliss that cannot be disturbed. This state has been described in various words, perhaps with some technical philosophical differences, as liberation, self-realization, nirvana, eternal heaven, unification of the soul with God, being eternally in the presence of God, etc. In my opinion, the philosophical differences are not very important from a practical point of view.

Certain diseases of the brain can also eliminate a sense of separateness from the rest of the universe. In particular, epileptic seizures can produce what looks like spiritual experiences ([Wikipedia, 2011]). The liberation of the jeevatma is a conscious and permanent state, achieved by deliberate efforts following scientific yogic practices. It is not an "experience," and surely not a result of some physical disorder. It is usually not possible to distinguish a self-realized man from other ordinary people. He continues to play the role that maayaa has assigned to him, with the idea of burning off the accumulated (fruits of his prior) karma. The only difference is that a self-realized man is in a highly blissful state of mind, which cannot be perturbed under any circumstances.

Thus, the apparent goal of achieving permanent everlasting happiness now becomes the goal of reuniting the jeevatma with Brahman. Now we turn to practical methods for achieving this liberation.

3 The Concept of Guru

The goal of achieving liberation looks impossible at first sight. The very idea of achieving a goal implies some action. Every action has a fruit that imprisons the jeevatma even further. The solution to this dilemma is the natural law that things must return to their equilibrium. In this case, the equilibrium state is the Brahman, undiluted by maayaa. Although every karma must have a fruit, what karma will have which fruit is nearly impossible to predict. The law that governs this is called **karmavipak**. To be consistent with the principle of equilibrium, it must allow a solution to the above dilemma. This solution is the concept of Guru. The term guru also means more generally a teacher/expert, and has entered the English language with this meaning. I will refer to such a person as a **guru**, reserving the technical term Guru to denote the meaning I will now set forth.

The atman by itself does not do anything, and therefore, is not bound by karma. When it is imprisoned by maayaa, it is only natural for it to work through maayaa itself, to prompt the intellect to embark on some actions that would free the atman according to karmavipak itself ([Tilak, 1963, Ch. 10]). In its true nature as atman, jeevatma and the all-pervading paramatma are the same. Therefore, the atman in its role as paramatma helps the jeevatma. In this context, it is called **Guru** ([Dandekar, 1985, Ch. 52, verse 105]; [Mrinalinimata, 1995]). Depending upon the needs of the jeevatma, it may take one or more external forms, but that is not always necessary. Finding our Guru is like a newborn baby finding its mother. When we find Guru, no proof is necessary, although some testing and introspection is necessary. These are not tests for the authenticity of the Guru, they are for testing the authenticity of our own feelings and intuition ([Ramadasaswami, 1989, 5.2]).

Anyway, the Guru/jeevatma team is bound to ultimately achieve the equilibrium (Geeta 11.33). Yogic and other religious practices are necessary so that one can listen to the pecking of the jeevatma to become free; described as **anusandhan** with (attunement to) the Guru. Before one can embark upon the more serious practices, some prerequisites, or rather corequisites, are necessary: *varnadharma* (dharma related to the stage in spiritual evolution) *ashramadharma* (dharma related to the stage of life), *yama, niyama,* and *aasanas.* Together, they will be referred to as **varnashramadharma**.

4 Corequisites for Yoga

4.1 Varnadharma (Laws for Predominant Stages in Spiritual Evolution)

There are four stages of evolution of the jeevatma, called **varna**s: Shudra, Vaishya, Kshatriya, and Brahmin. Although the "caste system" originated in the notion of varnas, my description of varnadharma here has absolutely nothing to do with this caste system. The reader is cautioned again that a superimposition of prior beliefs will distort the ideas I am trying to convey.

The discussion in this section is based mostly on ([Yogananda, 2001, ch. 4, 18]). Usually, the attunement to the Guru becomes feasible for a jeevatma only after a human birth, and progresses gradually. In the early stages of ignorance, one identifies oneself totally with one's body. A person in this state is called a **shudra**. The prescribed way for a person to progress in this stage of evolution is to perform manual labor in the service of mankind so as to diminish the identification with the body. One then enters a stage where wisdom begins to dawn. However, this wisdom needs to be cultivated. In this state, the person is called a **vaishya**. The prescribed way for a person at this stage of evolution is to perform mental labor in the service of mankind. This way, one further diminishes one's identification with the body, and while doing mental actions including dharmagrantha study, also manages to cultivate one's wisdom further.

Just as the jeevatma is trying to free itself, maayaa is working against this goal. So, as the mind develops, it finds itself playing many tricks. Also, the external circumstances start fighting. When someone picks up the courage to fight on, he is called a **kshatriya**. His prescribed duties are to utilize his fighting instincts to protect mankind and inspire other people on their path to liberation. When the jeevatma becomes free, but has yet to live in this world to finish off the accumulated karma, such a person is called a **brahmin**. A brahmin's prescribed duties are to get absorbed in spiritual practices so that he maintains the freedom.

The external attributes are like this: a brahmin is predominantly interested in spiritual progress and scientific studies (jnana and vijnana). A kshatriya is combative in nature, and aspires for a leadership role in whatever vocation such a person is in. A vaishya has a calculating, businesslike mind, and typically seeks out money. A shudra is a merry-go-lucky person, who does not engage in higher thoughts.

These are rough manifestations. Especially in modern days, everyone would exhibit a combination of these tendencies. Accordingly, one has to combine the different kinds of activities depending upon which varna is predominant at what time. Deciding upon the correct course of action in accordance with dharma is a tricky business.

The main enemy here is our own surrender to the desire for worldly pleasures. One has to keep constant vigil, keeping predominantly in mind the desire to become free. The Guru helps us with this, and yogic practices help us sort out the promptings of the Guru from the promptings of the worldly desires. Therefore, I have used the term corequisite as the title of this section. Behavior according to dharma and yogic practices complement and enrich each other. Mistakes are bound to happen, but we are also bound to recover from them "eventually" (i.e., perhaps after several births).

4.2 Aashramadharma (Laws regarding Stages in Life)

In addition to varnadharma, there are prescribed codes of conduct (ashramadharma) associated with four stages of life, called **aashrama**s. Loosely speaking, the aashramas are: (1) student, (2) householder, (3) monk-aspirant, and (4) monk. The student stage begins at the end of early childhood, when the child is ready to discipline himself enough to start his education. In this stage, we are supposed to acquire various skills and knowledge to enable ourselves to become a productive member of society (avidya). We should also study the dharmagranthas, and learn how to meditate and progress on the path of dharma. At this stage of life, we should not wish to earn money, and most definitely, should stay away from physical (especially sexual) attractions.

The householder stage is the foundation of the whole society. This starts after the end of formal education, typically with marriage. In this stage, we are supposed to have a productive life, earn money, fulfill all of our ambitions, and satisfy all our material desires. However, the main intention is to expand our sense of ego to become more inclusive, by loving first our family and friends, then enlarging this circle to the citizens of our state and nation, then to mankind, and eventually to realize our fundamental unity with everything in the universe. An integral part of this is to perform social service and make donations.

When we get older, we reach a certain plateau. At this point starts the third stage of life. Here, we start on a deeper understanding of the inherent inadequacy of material objects and desires. The passion with which we attended to these should now be turned toward self-realization. At the same time, we are still available to the younger generation for guidance if they so wish, but we should not interfere with their routine lives.

The fourth stage involves a total mental renunciation from everything of this world. We are then to focus entirely on self-realization. A part of the effort at this stage is to help others on this path.

4.3 Discipline of Yamas and Niyamas (Do's and Don'ts)

An integral part of varnashramadharma is also the observance of yamas and niyamas for a proper growth of an individual in harmony with society. These are described in the yogasutras of Patanjali (Kolhatkar 1996). The **yama**s are: *ahimsa* (not causing any harm to any being), *satya* (truthfulness), *asteya* (not stealing, including not having a mental desire for what does not rightfully belong to us), *brahmacharya* (for married couples, undiluted loyalty to each other and moderation in sex, for others celibacy), and *aparigraha* (nonattachment to one's possessions). One is supposed to observe the yamas physically as well as mentally. The goal is to discipline and condition the mind for further yogic practices. An extreme and blind adherence is not recommended. The question as to where to draw the line can only be answered by each individual, and mistakes are bound to happen. One should start at a physical level, and try to go to the mental level. With dharmagrantha study, introspection, yogic practices, and the grace of Guru, our mind starts developing. Then the observance of yamas becomes deeper and deeper, and the doubts begin to disappear.

The **niyama**s are: *tapa* (loosely: an intense effort to achieve an objective), *santosh* (contentment, absence of greed), *swadhyaya* (study, especially dharmagrantha study, also constant introspection), *shoucha* (cleanliness: physical as well as mental), and *Ishwarapranidhana* (commonly translated as bhakti: devotion to God). I think it is pretty clear why niyamas are necessary to condition ourselves for spiritual progress and even for living a productive life. I will comment on bhakti later.

4.4 Aasanas (Yogic Postures)

Many modern people often confusingly refer to aasanas as yoga. It is only a part, as many people are becoming aware of. My understanding is that they are necessary for spiritual growth only to the extent that one has to maintain good health lest bodily ills interfere with spiritual progress. I am told that they play a greater role in raajayoga, at a minimum because they enable one to stay steady in a meditative posture. I have also heard that a practice of raajayoga unleashes such great power that one needs a strong body to withstand it.

5   YOGA (METHODS TO ACHIEVE SELF-REALIZATION)

With these prerequisites one is able to embark upon the more serious yogic practices. They are classified usually into four (not disjoint) classes: *jnaanayoga, karmayoga, raajayoga, and bhaktiyoga*, respectively utilizing our ability to think, our need to be doing some action all the time, our physiology/psychology, and our ability to love. Because each of us possesses each of these attributes, one should practice a combination of all four yogas. Some people use the term "maarga" (path) in place of yoga. Since the term path seems to insinuate that one can follow only of one of these practices, and I am advocating practicing a combination of all, I will avoid using the term maarga or path.

5.1   Jnaanayoga

In jnaanayoga, one contemplates constantly the question of "Who am I?" Equivalently, as we go through life's experiences, we constantly remind ourselves that these are not permanent, not I. This knowledge seeps in eventually. This is considered the hardest of all yogas, and I surely do not understand how it works, but it has been practiced and advocated by Ramana Maharshi in the recent past ([Ramanamaharshi, 1997]; [Chinmayananda, 2007]).

5.2   Karmayoga

Perhaps the most famous advocate and practitioner of karmayoga in the recent past was Lokamanya Tilak, who has explained its principles with great logical clarity in ([Tilak, 1963]). The starting observation is that we cannot avoid doing actions. Action means both physical and mental action; in this context, it is actually more of a mental action. So, not doing any mental action is not only extremely difficult, but deliberately trying to abstain from a mental action is itself an action. Moreover, the experience of the fruit of an action is an action in itself, with its own fruit. So, how does one get out of this? The key is that the action has to bear fruit on its performer. Like a jnanayogi, one has to keep in mind that the atman is the true reality; the cycle of action and fruit is a part of maayaa. Therefore, by becoming innately aware of one's true nature as atman, one is not actually performing any action, and therefore, does not accrue any fruit. The jeevatma still needs to go through the requisite cycles of birth and go on performing actions mandated by the previously accumulated actions, but rather than contributing to the koshas, they now work to demolish them. In the meantime, one has to use one's apparent freedom of choice not to get attached to the fruit. If someone does not do my bidding, and I get angry, not only have I suffered the fruit of his negative actions, but I have created a new action of getting angry. If on the other hand, I think that the negative action is only a fruit of some of my own previous action, and does not affect the "real" me, then I will only have reduced the karmic burden without having accrued a new one. This process is hard. Looking at the role models of Ram, Yudhishthir, and Tilak, it seems to me that an emotional response is not only an integral part of our lives, but even essential to some extent. However, what seems to be possible is to let wisdom take over these emotions before they become entrenched into our being. Thus, all of these great people were very angry when subjected to the main injustices of their lives, but this anger was not allowed to simmer and turn into hatred, or allowed to lead them astray from the path of dharma.

The discussion above says nothing about what actions to perform, only the attitude with which they are done. A self- realized yogi will automatically do the right thing. For others, the compassionate Krishna has suggested that they should engage in their natural duties. The word duty here does not mean duties imposed by the society. Clearly, to the extent that we want something from society (money, food, things to meet other needs, etc.), we have to give back to society something in exchange. These are business deals, not natural duties. Not expecting the fruit of actions does not mean that one should not expect a salary for the work one performs, or that one should not try to negotiate and arrive at an optimal balance between the payment and the amount and nature of the required work. These are business deals, and must be handled by the regulations prevailing at the time.

In karmayoga, the attitudes are of paramount importance. Krishna has assured us that when we have to perform some unnatural duties in order to be able to engage in our natural duties, and do this with the right, detached attitude, then we do not accrue any blemish (Geeta, e.g., 18.47). One's natural duties are those that are dictated by one's varna and ashrama. Even if we try to give them up, we cannot. It is here that we should perform them without any expectation of reward/punishment. Vinobaji ([Bhave, 1967, p. 56]) illustrates: the sun does a great job of dispelling darkness and sustaining all the creatures on this earth. If we praise the sun for this, he will be puzzled, and demand to see at least a spoonful of darkness to check if he can really dispel it!

5.3 Raajayoga

My understanding of raajayoga comes from the literature of Vivekanandaswami ([Vivekananda, 1989]) and Yoganandaswami. There is no particular reason for me to elaborate on this, and moreover, the practices here are supposed to be secret. I will only make some comments. Raajayoga should never be practiced without the guidance and supervision of a proper guru. It utilizes our physiology and psychology to achieve self-realization. Therefore, just as we prefer a licensed doctor to prescribe us any medicine, and for the same reasons, a proper guru is needed, and one needs to keep secret the instructions from him. The same techniques do not work for everyone, just as the same medicines are not to be taken by everyone independently of his or her medical profile! A necessary condition to avoid an improper guru is to ensure that he is not looking for our money or other material objects ([Ramadasaswami, 1989, 5.2]).

5.4 Bhaktiyoga

Bhaktiyoga is perhaps the most popular yoga, at least in its primitive form. It must be a really unfortunate person who has never experienced love. Bhaktiyoga teaches us to make this love more and more sublime, and use it to attain the salvation of the jeevatma. Just as the ocean is manifest to us because of its waves, so does the attributeless paramatma manifest itself in the form of the universe and its various components. In this role, it is called **parameshwara**, or more colloquially, **God**. It is absurd to look for proof of the existence of God, or argue that it does not exist. Whatever seems to exist, the very property of existence, is a manifestation of God.

Many names, images, symbols, and rituals have been devised to help us contemplate the different attributes of God. I will refer to the images and symbols as **gods**. Ram, Ganapati, Jesus, Allah, etc. are all names of God. The corresponding images are well-known. The cross, a conch shell, a bell, the menorah, etc. are all symbols of God. A scientist or businessman can treat his area of research or his customers and employees as images/symbols of God. Anything that absorbs our attention constantly and consistently will do. The purpose is to help us direct our love (expanded in the practice of the student and householder stages of life) toward God. Such love, developed into devotion, toward God is called **bhakti**.

Because the various gods and rituals to worship them change from community to community, even family to family, and also from time to time, I do not consider these details to be part of dharmashastra. Nevertheless, many of the names, images, symbols, and rituals used by the Hindu community are either deliberately designed or interpreted so as to remind us of the connection with dharmashastra if we meditate deeper into their meaning.

Bhaktiyoga is considered the easiest of yogas, but there are pitfalls.

One may confuse business deals with love: "God answers my prayers for so many good things, so I love Him." However, in this context, love is to be unconditional, not laced with carnal attraction or expectations of return, including a certain behavior from the one whom we love.

One may become bigoted: "Jesus is our savior, and if someone prefers to worship in some other way, she should adopt my viewpoint or else be ready for an eternity in hell." One has to understand that the different objects we see around us are but different aspects through which God is manifesting itself. People will find God through any of these. There is then no room for hatred.

One may engage in a mechanical performance of rituals, as if that is the end goal of all. Still, I am in favor of even a mechanical performance of some of the traditional rituals, which are consistent with yama, niyama, and varnashramadharma. Like everything else, devotion is an evolving process; rituals give it a chance to take root, express itself, and grow. At the same time, they should not be performed with an eye of getting public recognition, or at a cost of becoming an avoidable nuisance to everyone else. I am writing only about individual worship here, not public issues such as whether one is entitled to ring bells in a temple that happens to be near a mosque.

Bhakti is an essential part of raajayoga. A proper guru would never allow raajayoga practices without bhakti; doing so would produce monsters. At the same time, bhakti assumes a certain emotion directed toward God. In contrast, raajayoga works initially at a purely physical level (e.g., breathing exercises, focusing the mind on breathing or different parts of body, making certain sounds, etc.). Therefore, raajayoga can be practiced by everyone regardless of a developed idea of God and love toward God. A practice of raajayoga deepens and purifies bhakti. Thus, one should practice both; they help enrich each other and avoid each other's pitfalls. Bhakti also facilitates karmayoga; the devotee feels free to ask God for the fruit of his actions, but does not deviate from his devotion if it is not granted. Nonattachment to fruit turns into offering the fruit to God. Krishna mentions clearly that bhakti is the ultimate result of every other system of yoga; it is only with bhakti that one can understand Him the way He is, and merge into Him.

6 Individuals and the Material World

There are several efforts to measure happiness in a scientific manner so as to guide socio–economic policy []. In my opinion, these efforts are bound to fail at the scale of an individual for a number of reasons. First, any scientific survey involving many individuals cannot capture all the nuances of the notion. For example, a recent survey indicates that many people consider sex to be an activity leading to great happiness []. I doubt it very much how many of these respondents would enjoy sex if they are being raped. There may be many other less drastic side conditions which the respondents might not even be aware of themselves. Then again, the very inclusion of such items depend upon the imagination of the survey constructor, who cannot possibly imagine each and every notion of happiness with all its nuances. These survey based approaches also run the risk of defining happiness rather than measuring it in a neutral manner. If happiness is measured in terms of brain activity measurements, then we are essentially measuring the symptoms/signatures of a mental phenomenon. Even if we assume that science has progressed so greatly that a clear one–to–one correspondence can be established between the signature and the mental state, this implies that the same mental state will necessarily arise simply by activating the right signature in the brain rather than any experience which one would normally associate with happiness. The socio–economic policy will then consist of attaching machinery to everyone which produces these signatures; a great science fiction story to illustrate a total slavery rather than a total happiness [Lowry, 1994]. Then again, there is the nagging problem of the dichotomy between being happy momentarily versus what is good for the individual in the long run, the dichotomy between the individual and the society, and an even more serious problem of who gets to formulate and enforce the policies. A recent BBC documentary illustrates the many problems created by such efforts in the western societies [BBC Documentary, 2007]. It is very obvious to me that in addition to the flaws in the definitions and measurements as pointed out in that documentary, the material desires of those in power to formulate and enforce the policies based on these notions have destroyed completely any chance of the policies resulting in public welfare.

While it is clear to me that dharmashastra offers the most satisfactory way of dealing with these questions in the case of an individual, I don't have a solution to the question of how to translate these ideas into a socio–economic policy. To some extent, the problem seems to be similar to the problem of translating a pristine mathematical theory into a commercial product! Many efforts have been made in this direction from the ancient times – Kandusmruti, Atri Samhita, Parashar Samhita, Manusmruti, Arthashastra, Rajyavyavaharkosha of Gagabhatta, etc. Varnashramadharma serves as a separation of powers, akin but perhaps better than the system stipulated in the American constitution, as illustrated in more detail by Haradas [Haradas, 1999]. However, as Hardas himself points out, it is very subtle, and in a social context, too sensitive to each and every individual adhering to the dharma scrupulously. Indeed, Ramayana and Mahabharat would not have happened if the efforts of basing a socio–economic policy on varnashramdharma were successful in a stable manner. Even a casual reader can't escape noticing the fact that after the avatar of God was ended, the situation actually became even worse. The main problem here is again the material desires of those in charge of formulating and enforcing the policies. So, from Ramayana and Mahabharat to Arthashastra [Bhagawat, 1999], it is stipulated clearly that those in power position must be introspective and in control of their material desires. In Arthashastra, the penalties of transgressions of dharma are many times more for people who ought to know/behave better than for others.

I will venture some comments here about what the ideal society based on varnashramadharma would be like, and what an individual can do to accommodate the less than perfect world.

An ideal society based on varnashramadharma has the same external objectives as the American ideal: no person is intrinsically inferior or superior to anyone else, and everyone should have an opportunity to develop his or her full potential. However, the definition of development is not based purely on a material basis, but as described above, on the foundation of dharmashastra. As the vaishyas in the householder stage are the main engine of wealth generation, society should provide an environment to enable them to acquire or generate as much wealth as they can, consistent with yama, niyama, and varnashramadharma. In turn, they have the obligation to support the material well-being of the rest of society. This is not enlightened self-interest; a businessman's ashramadharma requires that the very notion of what constitutes "self" should extend to his employees, customers, and the rest of society. This is not charity, but an obligation. In turn, asteya forbids the other varnas from being greedy and taking undue advantage of the vaishyas, instead taking only what is needed for the proper performance of their varnashramadharma.

In this context, rights exist only to the extent necessary to fulfill one's obligations (Geeta 2.47). There is no room for greed here, or for laziness. All desires that are consistent with dharma are manifestations of God (Geeta 7.11). When a passing wish grows into such a desire, not taking proper actions to fulfill it is only a sinful laziness. Yama, niyama, and varnashramadharma help us to determine whether our desires and intended actions are proper or not.

As I mentioned in the discussion of karmayoga, some compromises are acceptable in the absence of the ideal society. For example, if a student does not have supportive parents, or resources to obtain her education without having to earn money, it is perfectly all right to earn the necessary amount of money while being a student, as long as the goal and the means are not confused. Any effort in the direction of dharma is bound by the law of karmavipak so as to result in a betterment of our circumstances.

To summarize, growth of a society, economic or otherwise, can only be defined in terms of the growth of all individuals in the society. What constitutes one's growth can only be determined by the individual, but must be achieved in harmony with society. The subject of dharmashastra provides the most in-depth, scientific, and logically clear theory and practices to achieve this goal. I have not made any claim as to whether the Hindu community (or myself) follows these principles. I have tried only to give a basic introduction to some aspects of the subject in a logical manner, following the axiomatic style of mathematics. In particular, I have tried to clarify the terminology of this subject and explain how to read the texts, the misunderstanding of which is a main cause of a lot of confusion and criticism in many discussions.

Acknowledgments

6.0.1 Appendix on Technical Words

I have used many Sanskrit words as technical words, because I feel the commonly used English terms can be misleading. Here is a list of the important terms, and a common translation (with which I often disagree). In order not to misinterpret this chapter, it is essential that the terms should be understood with the meaning I have ascribed to them, not the one indicated by the colloquial terminology from Table 6.0.1.

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Technical term	Colloquial term	Technical term	Colloquial term
Ahimsa	nonviolence	karma	action
aparigraha	nonattachment to material belongings	karmayoga	method of action
Aasana	yoga posture	karmavipak	law of action and its effects
Aashram	stage in life	Kshatriya	warrior
Asteya	non-stealing	kosha	enclosure like a cocoon
Atman	Soul	maayaa	illusion
Bhakti	devotion	niyama	do's of Hinduism
bhaktiyoga	method of devotion	paramatma	Soul of the universe
brahmacharya	absistence	parameshwara	God
Brahman	ultimate reality	raajayoga	method of meditation
Brahmin	priest	satya	truthfulness
Dharma	Hinduism	yama	don'ts of Hinduism
dharmagrantha	Hindu scripture	Shudra	laborer
Dharmashastra	Hindu philosophy	yoga	method for self realization
Guru	(spiritual) teacher	Vaishya	businessman
Jeevatma	Soul of an individual	varna	caste
jnaanayoga	method of knowledge		

Table 1: A glossary of some technical words and their commonly used English versions. I do not agree with many of these meanings.