

Student: What is the name of my religion? In which religion am I born?

Teacher: My child! Your question is most fascinating. Your curiosity deserves to be applauded. You deserve congratulation because there are many students who neither know their religion nor do they care to know even their own religion. See, normally our religion is known as 'Hindu Religion'. But in fact this is neither its original name, nor it is its complete nature.

Student: Please then tell me the true, complete name of my religion.

Teacher: The complete and correct name of our religion is Vedic Sanatana Hindu Dharma.

Student: Will you be kind enough to explain each and every term that you have employed here?

Teacher: Definitely! Vedic Sanatana Hindu Dharma has four terms:

1. Vedic
2. Sanatana
3. Hindu
4. Dharma

Vedic

1) Vedic means a religion which is Vedic in nature i.e. which is originated from the Veda, or which is prevailing since the time of Veda and which even today follows, respects and maintains its Vedic Character by and large.

Student: What does the word 'Vedic' signify?

Teacher: Vedic means which belongs to the Veda. Now before you ask a question what is the Veda, let me explain to you how many Vedas are there and what the word Veda means.

There are four Vedas:

1. Rigved
2. Yajurved
3. Samved
4. Atharvaved

Veda is the most ancient literature of the world. No other literature is as old as Veda. The word Veda has different meanings as it is derived from different roots in Sanskrit.

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| 1. Veda to Know | - Knowledge |
| 2. Veda to exist | - Existence |
| 3. Veda to obtain | - Obtaining |
| 4. Veda to think | - Thinking |

5. Veda to dwell - Residing
6. Veda to tell - Narrating
1. A literature by which you know about the Highest Reality is Veda (Vida to know). The highest Reality is one who has created this universe, who sustains this universe and who when time comes dissolves this universe. Vedas are the only source to know about all these. Hence the word Veda stands for 'knowledge'.
 2. Where does this, Highest Reality which is normally known as 'God', exist? If you want to know about the existence of God, Vedas are the only source. Hence Veda means 'Existence'.
 3. Now a query may arise in the mind that how to obtain that Highest Reality or God. The answer again is nothing but the Veda. In Vedic literature various ways are suggested by which one can obtain or attain the Highest Reality or God.
 4. How would you like to think about the Highest Reality? In fact all the ancient sages have devoted themselves seriously to contemplate upon the Highest Reality and to our great good fortune those thoughts are preserved as they were, in this Vedic Literature. Hence Veda occupies the highest position in the mind of thinkers and scholars of the ancient and modern world who desire to know about the Highest Reality.
 5. Where does the Highest Reality or God dwell? If you want to know the answer of this question you have to read this Vedic Literature. This Vedic Literature is full of such subjects which are capable of satisfying your hunger for knowledge or quest for the Highest Reality.
 6. Who will tell us about God or the Father or the Mother or the Creator of this Universe? Such questions may arise in your mind. But you need not worry. Whatever you want to know about the God or the Father or the Mother or the Creator or the Highest Reality in this world, Vedas can readily provide the answers to all of them.

Sanatana

Student: What is the meaning of the word Sanatana?

Teacher: Traditionally today a Hindu should like to call his religion *Sanatana* instead of Hindu. The word Santana means 'eternal'. A religion which is *Sana bhavahsanatanah*, means 'one which stays forever, perpetual, eternal, and endless.'

When we use the term *Sanatanadharmah* it could be explained in two ways –

1. *SanatanasyaDharmah*. The religion of one who is eternal. The Lord, the Highest Reality is eternal. It is never born or created and it will never die or perish.

Manusmruti has described the Highest Reality as –

'He who is attainable by super senses, subtle, unmanifested, eternal, belonging to all beings and beyond the reach of thinking is born of His own'.

This is the nature of *Sanatana* - eternal

The *Bhagavad Gita* has also addressed the Lord Krishna as *Sanatana*.

Mahabharata also designate the Highest Reality as *Sanatana*.

That one is said eternal and he is also new again and again.

Thus the Highest Reality in our tradition is always regarded as *Sanatana*–Eternal. So the religion affiliated to the Highest Reality is also designated as *Sanatana* – the Eternal.

The second derivative meaning of the word *Sanatana dharma* would be *SanatanahDharamah* – a religion itself is eternal, which sustains forever. Here one has to agree historically that in spite of numerous onslaughts from within and without, this religion has sustained, resisting all types of invasions during last ten thousand years or more. In the *Mahabharata* this religion itself is called *Sanatana* and possessed of eternal root.

The meaning of Sanskrit Shloka in *Mahabharata* is – The root of this Eternal Religion is itself eternal.

Prof. T.M.P. Mahadevan has rightly pointed out, 'The indigenous names by which Hinduism is known are *Sanatana –dharma* and Vedic – Dharma. *Sanatana-dharma* means eternal religion and is expressive of the truth that religion as such knows no age... It does not owe to its origin to any historical personage or prophet. Buddhism, Christianity and Islam are founded religions. Their dates are definite, since their authors are known. No such date of founder can be cited as marking the beginning of Hinduism. Hence it is called *Sanatana* and *Vaidika*, ancient and revealed.'

Any would like to agree with Dr. S. Radhakrishnan the late President of India, when he remarks, 'Hinduism is a movement, not a position, a process, not a cult, a growing tradition, not affixed revelation.'

Dr. Louis Renou has rightly remarked 'Hinduism is indeed a complex and rich religion, no founders initiative, no dogmas, no reform have imposed restriction on its domains; on the contrary, the contributions of the centuries have been superimposed without ever wearing out previous layers of development'.

Hindu

Student: What does the term **Hindu** signify? How this word is coined? What is its derivative meaning?

Teacher: Like the term 'India' the word 'Hindu' is of a foreign origin. It has come from Persian language. Persians pronounced the word 'Sindhu' as Hindu, and named the people residing on the banks of SindhuRiver as Hindu. Greeks, who probably gained their idea of India from the Persians, dropped hard aspirate and called the Hindus as 'Indoo'. Later this Indoo became Indica and in English it is now India.

The term 'Hindu' as remarked by Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, 'has originally a territorial and not a creedal significance. It implied residential in a well-defined geographical area.'

Historically speaking before the 15th century the term 'Hindu' was completely unknown to India. Neither in its religious literature nor in any secular writing the term 'Hindu' was utilized to signify the Vedic Sanatana Dharma.

For the first time *Merutantra* and *Kalika-Purana* gave us the term 'Hindu'.

The meaning of the shloka given is : Right from the Himalaya up to the Indu Lake, the land which is created by God, is known as Hindu-sthana.

Late VinobaBhavedefined Hindu as under:

He, who stays firmly in order of Varna (Caste) and Asrama (Stages of Life), devotee of cow, respecting the Vedas as the origin (of his religion), never disrespecting idol, holds in high esteem all the religions, believes in the rebirth and desires to get release from it, has compassion for all the beings, is certainly regarded as Hindu. His mind is pained by violence hence he is called 'Hin-du.

In short, as a 'Hindu' I must eliminate evil (external or internal), be humble in my behavior and be generous to donate to all who live in my surrounding either men or animal.

Homework:

1. How many Vedas are there? Research on them and write one paragraph (5-10 Lines) on each Veda.
2. Refer to **AkhandJyoti of May and June 2013 page 3**. Read "Let the desires be judicious". What you understand from this article? Please explain in your words (10 lines) the theme of this article and how you will put into practice in your life.
3. Refer to **AkhandJyoti of March and April page 19** - Small article on incidence with Mahatma Gandhi. Please explain in your words the moral or teaching behind this article and how you will put into practice in your life.

Dharma**Meaning of Dharma:**

Student: Would you be kind enough to explain the term 'Dharma' in such details as you have explained the term 'Hindu'?

Teacher: The western scholars normally try to translate the term 'Dharma' as religion. But Indians are not satisfied with it; because the connotation of the word 'Dharma' is much more wider than that of 'religion'.

Indians are of the opinion that the 'religion' is not the correct translation of 'Dharma'.

The different meanings of the word 'Dharma' as found in various dictionaries is:

1. Punya –Merit, 2. Sruta and Smarta Karma-actions as described in Vedic and Smriti literature. 3. Karma-JanyaAdrasta –unseen merits originated by action (of a person).
4. Atma –Soul. 5. Jivatma –Individual Soul. 6. Sadachar –good character. 7. Svabhava –nature. 8. Yaga –Sacrifice. 9. Ahimsa –non-violence. 10. Nyaya –justice. 11. Sat Sang –Company of a good person. 12. Dana –donation.

Student: So, many meanings of one word? This is really confusing and perplexing.

Teacher: No, Not at all. One word may have many meanings in the dictionary. It varies as per its context. This is true of any language. Even in English, word 'Capital' has different meanings. When it is used in context with alphabets it has one meaning. But when we say capital city it has another meaning. While in judgment capital punishment the word capital signifies quite a different meaning. Similarly the word 'Dharma' assumes various meanings as per its context or usage.

The term 'Dharma' is of complex significance as it stands for all those ideals and purpose, influences and institutions which are responsible in shaping the character of a man that too as an individual and as a member of the society. In fact it can be said a path of living leading to happiness on the earth and ultimate salvation.

Student: I understand. But what is the meaning of the word 'Dharma' when we say Sanatana Vedic Dharma?

Teacher: 'Dharma' word is derived from the root dhr. It means among others 'to be', 'to exist', 'to live', 'to hold', 'to bear up', 'to maintain', 'to support', 'and to sustain'. So the other meanings of the word 'Dharma' are suggested as 'being', 'existence', 'way of life', 'holding', 'bearing up', 'maintenance', 'support' and 'substance' or 'sustainability'.

In Indian tradition the word Dharma is defined in Manusmriti as-

The sacred tradition of the Veda, Smriti, good conduct of virtuous man and whatever agreeable to one's soul-these four are said to be the visible characteristics of dharma.

At another place ten virtues are regarded as dharma by Manu. Those are- Fortitude, forgiveness, self-control, abstention from stealing (the property of others), purity, control of senses, wisdom, knowledge, truthfulness and refrain from anger.

But Sage Yajnavalkya has regarded all these virtues as 'Dharma-sadhana' – means to achieve Dharma.

The famous definition of 'Dharma' is found in the Mahabharata as under:

It is called dharma by upholding or sustaining, dharma uphold the people. Whatever is attached with upholdment is called Dharma.

The main function of the dharma is to uphold the society. It is dharma by which the whole society is bound together, exists together, works together and ultimately liberates one's own soul. Think for a while if there is nothing like 'dharma'- a binding force then all the human beings would act like an animal, no one would be under any control. So, the 'dharma' is the most binding factor by which a man, simply born like other animals, becomes a cultured man. So, the main function of 'dharma' according to the Mahabharata is to uphold the society.

How does this Dharma originate?

Student: How does this 'dharma' originate? Or whether dharma has anything to do with individual or not?

Teacher: According to the Mahabharata the personal behavior of an individual is the real characteristic of 'dharma'.

The characteristic of dharma is 'Achara' (character of a person) i.e. the personal behavior of a person. Whatever man practices, reflects his dharma. It is said that what man thinks he speaks, what he speaks he preaches, what he preaches he practices and whatever he practices becomes his habits which ultimately becomes character. This ultimately reflects his dharma, because the Mahabharata maintains that the dharma originates from a character of a person.

In modern terminology dharma is nothing but 'the way of life'. How you lead your life reflects your dharma and it is your 'dharma' which enlightens your way of life. Dharma

and the way of life are interrelated like the two sides of a coin. They are inseparable from one another.

Importance of Dharma:

Student: What is the importance of Dharma? Is it inevitable for human being?

Teacher: Your query is full of deep sense of understanding. Without knowing of the importance of anything no one would like to accept it. It is said that:

Food, Sleep, Fear and copulation are the same like animals in men. Only the dharma is specially more, men without dharma are no better than animals. It is rare quality bestowed upon them by god to distinguish them from other animals.

Moreover it is firmly believed that when a human being ultimately leaves this world only his dharma accompanies him, rest of the things remains then and there.

The only friend who follows man even after his death is dharma, because everything else is perished at the time when body perishes.

If dharma is violated it destroys and if dharma is protected it protects.

The above statement was amended later on as:

Where there is dharma, Krishna i.e. the Lord Himself is there and where there is Krishna the victory is there.

Thus if you want divinity to descend in you, you have to prepare ground by following 'dharma' properly in your life.

One need not abandon dharma either by desire or by fear, or greed, or even for the sake of life. Dharma is perpetual, happiness or misery is impermanent. Soul is permanent while its purpose is impermanent.

Dharma is in fact a life force meant for the upliftment of individual and binding together the individuals in society for peace, law and order or tranquility is the most coveted one and the willing acceptance of dharma. Man without dharma is an animal, moving in society without horns on the head. So a wise one should not think of renouncing dharma even in the dream because one can attain all the four human goals –dharma, artha, Kama and moksha by following dharma only.

Main Features of Dharma:

Student: What are the main features or rather characteristics of Sanatana Hindu Dharma?

Teacher: Scholars have pointed out many characteristics of Hinduism. Some of them are listed below:

1. Reverence for the Vedas
2. Belief in re-birth
3. The Caste System
4. Ritualism
5. Faith in Guru
6. Belief in re-incarnation
7. Three ways of salvation – Bhakti (Devotion) Gyan (Knowledge) and Karma (Action).
8. Respect for Cow
9. Vegetarianism
10. Following the tradition
11. Insistence of Moral Behavior (Sadachar)
12. Sublimation and suppression of senses
13. Enjoyment of worldly objects with the sense of renouncement
14. Victory – not physical but spiritual
15. Highest Reality is designated by various names yet it is one
16. Unity in Diversity
17. Always aiming for higher progress (spiritually)
18. Tolerance of the opinion of others
19. Respect for the faith for others
20. Strongly opposed to conversion
21. Yagya (Good Act), Daan (Donation) Tapa (Penance) and Daya (Compassion) are ingredients of the Dharma
22. Acceptance of repaying the three debts
23. Faith in the Highest Reality
24. More attachment to spiritual values rather than physical one
25. True democracy in the field of religion
26. Idea of fraternity, brotherhood, friendship, co-existence
27. Acceptance of one Highest Reality in all animate and inanimate objects
28. Aatma is Paramatma, Jeev is Brahma –Complete identification of individual soul with the cosmic soul
29. Worship of five Gods –Ganesh, Vishnu, Shiva, Shakti and Surya (Sun)
30. Idol worship, building of temples, fasting etc. are accepted for the purification of mind

31. The real liberation is by self-realization –knowledge only
32. Hinduism is a value based religion which stands for on one side physical prosperity of a person and on the other side spiritual liberation too.

How to practice Dharma?

Student: How one can practice dharma in life?

Teacher: It is Achar –behavior of a person which is regarded as the base or origin of dharma. Here good behavior (Sadachar) is meant. Any type of free behavior as accepted in so-called free society cannot give rise to dharma in life.

Student: What is Sadachar?

Teacher:Two words in Sadachar. Sat and Achar. Sat means praiseworthy. Achar means conduct. Such a behavior is known as Sadachar –good conduct.

An action which helps in climbing up to Brahman –Highest Reality is Sadachar.

To cultivate human virtues like truth, non-violence, mercy etc. and to refrain from vices like lust, anger, greed etc. is real sadachar-a good conduct which would lead up to liberation in life.

Student: Who is the founder of the Hindu Religion?

Teacher: First try to understand that today what is known as Hindu Religion is in fact a Vedic Sanatana Religion. The word Hindu for this Sanatana Vedic Religion is very very late development. Neither Vedas, nor Upanishads, nor Ramayana or Mahabharata or even Acharyas like Sankracharya or Ramanujacharya has used the word Hindu.

Secondly this religion is known as Sanatana because no found of this religion is known. Buddha was the founder of Buddhism there is no such specific person known as the founder of the religion.

Student: What is Hinduism?

Teacher: In this Sanatana Vedic Religion there is nothing like ‘ism’, just as socialism, communism etc. In fact the ancient seers in this religion have pondered upon basic questions of life just as how are we born? Why are we living? What should be the goal? Such problems were given proper thoughts and certain ways were searched, researched and those ways for the life of human being are laid down in scriptures. So instead of calling it ‘ism’ it is better to call ‘a way of life’ where human being is at the center and how to turn this human into divine is the purpose of such ‘a way of life’.