

# Observations on *Dharma*

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Source: <http://www.shiningworld.com/site/satsang/read/2750>

**Quinn:** Hi, Ted.

I read your *satsang* on *dharma*. You gave a very thorough and perfectly detailed response to the question. I only wanted to add one very minor change.

“Given that the fundamental ethical norm is non-harm, however, we could say that the guiding principle for *vishesha dharma* is to do whatever causes the least degree of harm to the fewest number of people.”

I would change it to “the fewest number and lowest degree of living beings.” In other words, it is less hurtful and less *adharmic* to kill and eat a plant than a higher life form such as an animal.

Speaking of animals, I have an observation about *dharma* in general. In my own practice I have found that it is far more conducive to have a burning desire for *dharma* rather than *moksa*, although if one leads a very *dharmic* life, one is likely to gain *moksa*. The story of Yudhishtira at the end of the *Mahabharata*, where he starts the trek into the Himalayas and the mountainous path that leads to one’s ascension into heaven, pointed this out to me. His wife and brothers drop dead one by one as they follow him. Every time one dropped, Bhima asked Yudhishtira the reason for their fall. But he did not even look back to help any of them, which seemed very cruel to Bhima. Yudhishtira knew their fate was due to *adharmic* actions during their lifetimes and that the time to leave earthly ties had come for him, and he needed to focus his mind (*svadharma*). Yudhishtira was the only one to reach the mountain peak in his mortal body, along with a stray dog who followed him all the way.

On reaching the top, Indra asked him to abandon the dog before entering the chariot to heaven. But Yudhishtira refused to do so, citing the dog’s unflinching loyalty as a reason and refusing *moksa* for the sake of *dharma*. It turned out that the dog is the god of *dharma* in disguise, who praised Yudhishtira for his *dharmic* ways. The incident symbolized that *dharma* follows you till the end.

Here’s the tale: <http://www.storypick.com/yudhishtira-and-dog-sto...>

Then Indra told him his wife and brothers were already in heaven. On reaching heaven, Yudhishtira did not find them. Instead, he only saw Duryodhana and his cohorts. The gods told Yudhishtira that his brothers were in Naraka (hell), atoning for their sins. Yudhishtira went there to meet them, but all the gore and horrors of hell horrified him. After hearing the voices of his beloved brothers and Draupadi calling out to him, asking him to stay with them in their misery, Yudhishtira ordered the divine charioteer to return to heaven alone. He preferred to live in hell with good people than in a heaven with his enemies. This turned out to be another illusion to test him and also to enable him to atone for his sin of deceiving his *guru* during the war where he half-lied to Drona about Ashwatthama’s death. Thereafter Indra and Krishna appeared before him and told him that his brothers (including Karna) were already in heaven, but so were his enemies. So finally he left his body behind in hell and returned to heaven with Indra, where he was reunited with his wife and brothers.

~ Best wishes, Quinn

**Ted:** Hi, Quinn. Your revision is worth noting.

As for your observation about *dharma*, you are correct that for the *karmi*, the one who is concerned about getting to heaven, *dharma* is the top priority. For the *jijnasu*, one who wants self-knowledge and seeks *moksa*, upholding *dharma* is necessary but insufficient. That is, one must act in accordance with *dharma* in order to purify the mind, but no matter how saintly the person is or how pure the mind, only self-knowledge will ultimately remove the ignorance that prevents one from apprehending and appreciating one's true nature as limitless conscious existence and thereby liberate one from *samsara* and put a permanent end to the suffering that is its inherent character.

~ All the best, Ted

**Quinn:** Hi, Ted.

That's a very valid point and one that is critical to Vedanta because it sets Vedanta apart from other spiritual modalities, even within Hinduism as well as without. But that is not to say that a *dharmic jiva*, having gone through the purifications of *viveka* and *vairagya* as Yudhishtira had, and practicing the selfless service of *karma yoga* and devotion to a *guru*, makes the scriptures, meditation and self-inquiry a part of his *svadharma* and thus acquires *moksa* at some point. The importance here as exemplified in the "dog story" of the *Mahabharata* is that the liberated *jiva* CONTINUES his *dharmic* ways until the very end, whereas we have seen that some "enlightened" *gurus* and masters have used their self-realization in *adharmic* ways. Thinking that they now have a "free ride" to everlasting freedom, they use their "self-realized" diploma as a means to acquire wealth, accouterments and creature comforts. Despite what the scriptures say and what many Vedantins believe, they will have a serious debt to pay for not following *dharma* to their physical demise, even more so than *jivas* who were not self-realized. So that is why, in my opinion, a burning desire for *dharma* is even more important to me personally than a desire for *moksa*.

In his *satsang* at Trout Lake last year, Ramji basically made the same point about non-dual *advaita bhakti* as stated in Narada's *Bhakti Sutra* (based on commentaries by Swami Paramarthananda), that, at the end of the day, *advaita bhakti* reached the same point as *nirguna Isvara jnanam* in realizing that there is only the self, which is our true nature. The various stages of meditation and self-inquiry bring one to that realization.

I'm really grateful for your comments and *satsangs* because they always encourage me think things through.

~ All my best, Quinn