

Violence and Dharma

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2010-12-04

Source: <http://www.shiningworld.com/site/satsang/read/1557>

Seeker: Dear Ram, thanks for your inspiring email. I'm kind of surprised that you are advocating violence. The Dalai Lama is not, and I have to agree with him. I would've liked to see the US rely on more covert operations for a while, freeze assets and do other things first. What we're doing is just keeping the wheel of *karma* going. Why do you think it's a good idea?

Ram: Human beings, for whatever reasons, are here on earth in these strange meat tubes to get what they want. There are two ways you can approach getting what you want: *dharmically* or *adharmically*. *Dharma* means the understanding that we are all the same. On a social level it means that one is mindful of the effects of one's actions on others. For example, there is a universal value for honesty because nobody likes to be deceived. There is a universal value for non-injury because nobody likes to be injured. Most of the laws and rules and social conventions, manners, in society are about helping humans to remember that they are not alone, that their choices and the actions flowing from them impact the total. Without this understanding there is no civilization. There is life but it is terribly uncertain and dangerous because people go about getting what they want without thinking of anyone else. When you pursue what you want *adharmically* you are not appreciated by society and depending on the severity of the rules contravened may be classified as a criminal. People break the rules for a number of reasons, most of which boil down to a simple formula: you want what you want so badly that you cannot entertain the idea of not getting it quickly; you cannot wait for the universe to deliver it, so you violate the rules, irrespective of the suffering your actions cause others. People often become violent when they see that ethical pursuit of their goals is going to take longer than they wish to wait. This type of person is tormented by his or her fears and desires and needs a quick resolution of events to relieve the torment.

Not everyone has an understanding of *dharma*. So how do such people fit into society? They don't. They live in their own worlds and imagine that their will is sovereign. So without regard for the suffering their actions cause others they send jets into the World Trade Center and kill thousands. So the question becomes, how does society protect itself from the few who do not share their values?

Adharmic behavior does not just include what we would call "criminal" behavior, murder, theft, etc. but any lapse in the understanding that we are all in this business of life together. When a father takes to alcohol and neglects his children, he is a kind of criminal because his selfishness causes injury to his wife and children, not to mention himself. A love affair by a married person is a kind of violence, violation of *dharma*, because it injures everyone involved. When a person smokes cigarettes he or she violates biological *dharma* and inflicts a continuous low level of violence on his or her self. There are billions of transgressions of *dharma* worldwide every day.

The word "violence" means "to violate." Violate what? The rules, *dharma*. Violence is not just physical like rape or the WTC disaster. It is a state of mind. When you are in this state of mind you inflict injury on yourself and/or others. When you are in a *dharmic* state of mind you are in harmony with the total and life is basically free of

conflict. A person who often feels frustrated and angry is generally violating some kind of *dharma*, usually with reference to the laws of nature or the social laws. If you injure yourself it is not generally thought that this is a social problem, although it is for the obvious reason that nobody here is completely isolated.

Dharma is exceptionally valuable. So how do the people who follow *dharma* deal with those who don't? Kids, for example. Kids, until they are educated do not generally give a damn about *dharma*. They want what they want and they will do anything to get it: lie, cheat, steal, inflict violence on others – you name it. The family, society, educates them and hopefully they grow up to be ethical in their dealings with others. But sometimes people slip through the cracks or are so egoic that they simply cannot factor in the needs of others. Saddam Hussein wanted Kuwait's oil, so he just took it. What is the proper response of society? Should it call him up and tell him, "Naughty boy, give it back"? Mind you, Saddam has been a criminal for his whole adult life, personally murdering many people in his rise to power. Slobodan Milosovic and his cronies murdered tens of thousands of people simply because they didn't like their ethnicity. What do you do with these people? They are not amenable to reason. Look at Milosovic now, cooling his heels in the Hague. He is saying that the whole court, the whole concept of international law, is bogus, that he alone is right. If you do nothing with this kind of person, you have a very serious problem. Look at how long it took for the world to stand up to Hitler and how many lives were lost – before the war. This kind of person thinks that he or she is above the rules and enjoys the suffering of others. Do you honestly believe that cutting off some of Bin Laden's funds is going to cause him to see the light? Money to these people is easy to come by. When you hold a gun to a person's head he or she will give you everything in exchange for his or her life. Do you pray for these people? Sure, but does it do any good? No, it doesn't. Why? Because they are so hard-hearted they do not feel your prayers. Most good people have never come in contact with this kind of person, so they think that these people are really just a bit misguided and that a hug and a few kind words will bring them back into the fold. Sure, kindness and concern will rehabilitate the small social criminals because they still have some understanding of the rights of others to live free of fear. But Bin Laden? This is a man with a tremendous will and a great mind who is convinced that he is an emissary of God sent here to make war on the infidels. The authorities knew about Bin Laden for years and made a few half-hearted attempts to catch him. But it was a lot of work and he only killed hundreds and was well-protected by a whole network of people who think exactly like him, and well – it was just too much trouble. And so what do you have? The WTC catastrophe.

The actions you take to defend *dharma*, universal values, are not violence. People who violate *dharma* on the scale of a Hitler or a Milosovic only understand the language of power and violence. They are not civilized. So when you communicate with them you don't invite them for a nice happy chat with the Dalai Lama. You assign the job of "bringing them to justice" to the professionals that are trained to communicate on that gross level.

Why does a soldier not suffer *karma* for the lives he takes in (a righteous) battle? Why is he honored as a hero? Because his actions are actually in harmony with both universal *dharma* and his own personal *dharma*. You sleep well at night because there are many men, policemen, who are willing to put themselves in harm's way to protect you. These people are not criminals even though they often have to use "violence" to defend you. On the contrary, they usually have a very refined sense of *dharma*, understand its value and are sworn to defend it. And God, the universe, wants *dharma* to prevail because without it people will be fearful and unable to live

peacefully and (hopefully) evolve into the highest expressions of their innate divinity. I do not “advocate” violence as you said. I deplore violence in every way and I doubt that there are many people in the world who live a more peaceful and mindful life than I do. But I do advocate the defense of *dharma*. I don’t particularly care for President Bush’s politics, but he is right about this issue and he deserves our support. Because you are pro-*dharma* does not mean that you are pro-war. Before they started dropping bombs they asked the Taliban to hand over Bin Laden. They informed the Taliban what the consequences of not surrendering Bin Laden would be and they waited. Don’t you think they would not have been happy to have him handed over on a silver platter? Wouldn’t it have made their lives (and ours) a lot simpler? But the Taliban was not interested. Why? Because they share the same values as Bin Laden. They are ready and willing to violate universal values to achieve their petty ends. Are you aware that the Taliban throws acid in the faces of women who neglect to cover their faces? They stone adulterers to death and bury people alive who transgress their petty rules. Do you think that cutting off the funds of people like that is going to help either the victims or the victimizers? You’ll notice that the Dalai Lama did not volunteer to talk some sense into these people. If, out of a false sense of compassion, you allow these kinds of people to pursue their selfish ends you are actually advocating violence because you are making it possible for them to do what they do.

~ Ram