

Satsang with Sri Swami Veditatmananda Saraswati
Arsha Vidya Gurukulam
More on Dharma

Question

How do we know what *dharma*, or the right thing to do in a given situation is?

Answer

Dharma as a value, like honesty and non-violence, has to be interpreted in a given situation. These values are universal but the interpretation is subjective, depending upon time, place and conditions. We face many conflicting situations where we need to interpret what a given value means in a given situation. It is possible to commit mistakes when we interpret these values, as we are limited in knowledge and wisdom. To decide what is right or wrong in a given situation may require a lot of information and wisdom, which we may or may not have. We can only make a judgment based on our best intentions and live by it. We cannot expect to be always right. The result of our actions may not always be in accordance with our intentions. Thus, following *dharma* is a process of learning. Sometimes our intention may not be to violate *dharma*, but our judgment of the situation may be wrong. However, we can learn from those mistakes and perhaps be a better judge of the situation the next time.

Question

Why did Arjuna not forgive Duryodhana?

Answer

All actions have to be judged based on the codes of conduct that prevail at that time. The codes of conduct we follow today may not be

relevant, say, some 50-100 years from now. Therefore when we talk of what happens in the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata, we have to take into account the laws and codes of conduct that were prevalent then. As *kṣatriyas* it was the duty of the Pāṇḍavas to protect *dharma* and those who followed *dharma*. That was the purpose of the law and that is what a *kṣatriya* was required to do. Lord Krishna says (BG 4-8),

***paritrāṇāya sādḥūnām vināśāya ca duṣkṛtām
dharmasaṁsthāpanārthāya sambhavāmi yuge yuge***

For the protection of those who are committed to *dharma* and the destruction (conversion) of those who follow *adharma*, and for the establishment of *dharma*, I come into being in every *yuga*.

The *sādhus* and people who are on the righteous path must be protected from the wicked. They typically do not have the physical strength to protect themselves.

Duryodhana represented *adharma*. All efforts were made to avoid the war. Lord Krishna himself went as a mediator and made various offers to Duryodhana. However, Duryodhana did not accept any of them and was unfair in his demands, making the war inevitable. Therefore, the war of Kurukṣetra was fought to protect *dharma*, rather than to regain the kingdom¹.

¹ Satsang transcribed and edited by Chaya Raj, KK Davey and Jayshree Ramakrishnan.