



Ramayana Explorations



Definition of Dharma

Definition taken from <http://www.dharmasource.com/dharma.html> (no longer available...)

Dharma is so called, because it holds: Dharma alone holds the people, etc. The word Dharma is derived from the root DHR- to hold- and its etymological meaning is 'that which holds' this world, or the people of the world, or the whole creation from the microcosm to the macrocosm. It is the eternal Divine Law of the Lord. The entire creation is held together and sustained by the All-powerful Law of God. Practice of Dharma, therefore, means recognition of this Law and abidance by it.

That which brings well-being to man is Dharma. Dharma supports this world. The people are upheld by Dharma. That which accrues preservation of beings is Dharma. Dharma leads to eternal happiness and immortality.

That which is Dharma is verily the Truth. Therefore, whosoever speaks the truth is said to speak Dharma, and whosoever speaks Dharma is said to speak the truth. One and the same thing becomes both.

Dharma includes all external deeds, as well as thoughts and other mental practices which tend to elevate the character of a man. Dharma comes from the Divine and leads you to the Divine.

No language is perfect. There is no proper equivalent word in English for the Sanskrit term Dharma. It is very difficult to define Dharma.

Dharma is generally defined as 'righteousness' or 'duty'. Dharma is the principle of righteousness. It is the principle of holiness. It is also the principle of unity. Bhishma says in his instructions to Yudhishtira that whatever creates conflict is Adharma, and whatever puts an end to conflict and brings about unity and harmony is Dharma. Anything that helps to unite all and develop pure divine love and universal brotherhood, is Dharma. Anything that creates discord, split and disharmony and fomented hatred, is Adharma.

Dharma is the cementer and sustainer of social life. The rules of Dharma have been laid down for regulating the worldly affairs of men. Dharma brings as its consequence happiness, both in this world and in the next. Dharma is the means of preserving one's self. If you transgress it, it will kill you. If you protect it, it will protect you. It is your soul companion after death. It is the sole refuge of humanity.

That which elevates one is Dharma. This is another definition. Dharma is that which leads you to the path of perfection and glory. Dharma is that which helps you to have direct communion with the Lord. Dharma is that which makes you divine. Dharma is the ascending stairway unto God. Self-realisation is the highest Dharma. Dharma is the heart of Hindu ethics. God is the centre of Dharma.

Dharma means Achara or the regulation of daily life. Achara is the supreme Dharma. It is the basis of Tapas or austerity. It leads to wealth, beauty, longevity and continuity of lineage. Evil conduct and immorality will lead to ill-fame, sorrow, disease and premature death. Dharma has its root in morality the controller of Dharma is God Himself.

Maharshi Jaimini defines Dharma as that which is enjoined by the Vedas and is not ultimately productive of suffering.

Rishi Kanada, founder of the Vaiseshika system of philosophy, has given the best definition of Dharma, in his Vaiseshika Sutras:

"That which leads to the attainment of Abhyudaya (prosperity in this world) and Nihisreyasa (total cessation of pain and attainment of eternal bliss hereafter) is Dharma".

Discussion Question for in-class:

Write about the moral dilemmas in this story

—the King must decide if he will follow dharma and keep his promise to Kaykeyi (even though doing so will mean his son Rama who rightfully should be king next will be supplanted by his brother)

--Rama must decide if he will do what his father says and go away to the forest for 14 years (even when he knows Kaykeyi has gotten him to do a wicked thing) or will he take Laksmanas advice and go into open rebellion with arms

--Rama must also decide if he will go against his mother who says he must follow her and not his father's wishes

What might you have done in Rama's place? Write about the seeming place of "dharma" in the story and how it guides Rama's decisions in these early dilemmas . (Look again at the definition of dharma). Please use a number of quotes from the story to support your thinking. (length roughly 150-250)

Homework: On page 883-884 of the 2nd edition's introduction to India's Heroic Age (given in class), our text provides two definitions of dharma, and this handout provides other similar definitions. Write a one-two page response to the story of Rama. Discuss, in particular, the concepts of Dharma and how we can see it enacted and modeled in the story. In particular, write what Rama represents by the end of the story. Discuss also any connections you can see in Rama's story to Campbell's notions of the hero monomyth.

--250-500 word Reading Response

finish reading the Ramayana selection in our text
