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INTERPRETATION OF DHAMMA AND ITS UNIVERSAL APPLICATION

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Everyone talks about Dhamma but no one understands it.

Practicing purity of mind--this is true Dhammaⁱ __ S N Goenka

Definition of Dharma

Word ‘Dhamma’ⁱⁱ in Pali and ‘Dharma’ in Sanskrit language which are made by ‘DHAR’ dhatu but both meanings are same.ⁱⁱⁱ

Dharma is Universal. This is the law. This is the truth. This is Dharma. It is not Buddhist, Hindu, Jain, Muslim, Christian, Parsi, or Sikh dharma. It is simply Dharma.

The moment you make it the exclusive property of a particular sect, Dharma is no longer Dharma. It has become sectarian and is harmful. You must understand that Dharma is universal. Dharma cannot be Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim or Christian. It is the law of nature.^{iv} For example, we say that the nature of fire is to burn. This is the dharma of fire. If it does not burn, it can't be fire. If it is fire it must burn. When fire burns, do you label the burning as Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist or Jain burning, or as Indian, European, American or Russian burning? Burning is burning. This is a law of nature.^v

In the same way, when one generates any negativity or defilement in the mind, one is bound to burn. The nature of defilement is to burn. No-one can save you from burning when you generate anger. You may keep on calling yourself a Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, Muslim, Jain or Sikh—it makes no difference; or a brahmin or a shudra—it makes no difference. This is the law; this is nature; this is Dharma.^{vi}

We have forgotten Dharma. Someone belongs to a certain sect and performs its rites or rituals, or professes its beliefs; he feels that makes him very Dharmic. Someone else belongs to

another sect and performs its rites, rituals and ceremonies, or believes in its philosophy. He too thinks that makes him a very Dharmic person. But both deceive themselves.

Dharma has nothing to do with such matters. They are sectarian, and Dharma is universal. Whether or not we perform this rite or that ritual, if we keep the mind free of negativities it is pure. And according to the law of nature, when the mind is free from defilements it naturally fills with metta (love), karuna (compassion), mudita (sympathetic joy), and upekkha (equanimity); and immediately one starts enjoying peace and harmony.

Rites and rituals, philosophies and dogmas have nothing to do with it. We have forgotten the truth of Dharma deep inside this universal law of nature makes no discrimination. Anyone who places a hand in burning fire is bound to burn oneself.

It makes no difference what religion one belongs to, what rites or rituals one performs, or what philosophy one believes in.

Distinctive Feature of Dharma

As already indicated, the distinctive feature of Dharma is that it should be capable of being realized at the experiential level through insight, and applied in daily life. Unless Dharma becomes applicable in daily life, it will be like a flower that is lovely and beautiful to look at, but does not emit any fragrance.

With the proper application of Dharma in daily life, one is bound to get amazing results. When this starts happening, one begins to realize sooner rather than later that applied Dharma is nothing but an art of living, as it keeps one happy and contented in all situations

The Buddha's Exposition of Dharma

The Buddha's exposition of Dharma can be briefly stated as follows:

I. Dharma is infinite^{vii}

II. Dharma as a Mental Object

III. Dharma as the Carrier of Wholesome Mental Factors

IV. Dharma as Duty

V. Dharma as Universal Truth Dharma means universal truth. It refers to laws of nature or the nature of laws (dhamma-niyamata). In the Vedas this was called Rta. All laws of nature are of a permanent character.

VI. Laws of Nature

The Law of Cause and Effect

"If this is, that comes to be; from the arising of this, that arises; if this is not, that does not come to be; from the stopping of this, that is stopped."

Dharma Works Here and Now (PRACTICAL ASPECTS AND APPLICATIONS OF DHAMMA)

When you generate any impurity in the mind, you are punished at once. If you break the law of a country or state, you might manage to escape punishment or delay it for years. But under the law of nature you cannot avoid the punishment or postpone it. Nature does not wait till you die. When you break the law you are punished that very moment. When you generate negativity in the mind, nature starts punishing you without delay.

If you do not break the law, if you live according to the law of nature and keep your mind pure, if you generate compassion and goodwill, then nature rewards you here and now. It will not wait until you die. You start experiencing peace and harmony here and now.^{viii}

When one starts realising this law of nature at the experiential level, one starts taking steps on the path of Dharma; one starts attaining Dharma, experiencing Dharma, and receiving the best, sweetest fruits of Dharma in this very life.

But first one has to liberate Dharma from the shackles and chains of different sects. Every sect will take you far away from Dharma. When you start realising the truth of Dharma, you cannot remain sectarian. You cannot differentiate between this or that person, this or that being. The law is applicable everywhere, to everyone.

If I am really a Dharmic person, when somebody abuses me I understand that this is a miserable, sick person: "This person has generated anger and hatred, and is therefore very

miserable. What should I generate in return? I cannot throw more petrol on this person who is burning in the fire of anger and hatred; instead I will generate love, compassion, goodwill. This is a sick person; why should I allow myself to succumb to the same sickness? Why generate anger towards this person?"

This is easy to understand and accept at the intellectual level; but at the real level, when someone abuses you, you start abusing that person in retaliation. This happens when you try to understand Dharma only intellectually rather than experientially.

Non-Sectarian Nature of Dharma

Dharma is non-sectarian and universal. There was a good deal of debate on this point; it seems difficult to achieve consensus on the precise meaning of these terms.

I will give an example of a poet in Tamil Nadu in the fifth century by the name of Walluwar, who spoke of concepts which can be loosely equated to Dharma. Walluwar was claimed by the Buddhists who said his ideas were the same as those in the Buddhist texts. The Jains claimed they were the same as their teachings. A prominent Christian in the late nineteenth century said Walluwar must have taken up the ideas of the Christian mystics who had earlier settled down in that region. Hindus claim he was a Hindu and they put a sacred thread on his body in their images of him. I don't want to labour the point; you don't need any other evidence that the universal Dharma is the same: the universal Dharma.

Dharma and Science

We had an excellent presentation on whether Dharma is inconsistent with science. What emerged was, that these deal with two different domains: one with the physical domain of matter, the other with the spiritual dimension of non-matter. Notwithstanding that fact, Dharma has an independent claim as a science because it deals with the mind. Just because it does not deal with matter, you cannot call it unscientific.^{ix} In the same way, you cannot say science is totally materialistic because science also has elements of humanism built into it. What emerged was, that we should not look at the two as opposite, but as complementary to each other. science cannot exist without Dharma, and Dharma cannot exist without science. Accordingly it is possible to achieve a unity between Dharma and Science, and examples were given where the current scientists of today are working towards this unity.^x

Harming Others, You Harm Yourself

Once you start investigating the truth within yourself, the law of nature will be revealed. Because of your intellectual understanding or because of your devotion to the teaching of the Enlightened One, you may remind yourself that you should not harm others. But when you go deep inside, you understand by experience that when you abstain from harming others, you actually abstain from harming yourself.

You cannot hurt or harm anyone unless you have first harmed yourself. You cannot kill anyone unless you have first killed the peace and harmony within you. You cannot kill anybody without generating a tremendous amount of anger, hatred, ill will, and animosity. When you generate such negativity you are the first victim because you become so miserable.

You cannot really understand this until you start observing the interaction of mind and matter within yourself, within the framework of this body. When you generate any negativity in the mind, it influences the body (matter), and there is bound to be an unpleasant physical sensation. That unpleasant sensation will again influence the negativity in your mind. When you generate more negativity, there will be more unpleasant sensations in the body; and with more unpleasant sensation in the body, there will be more negativity. A vicious circle starts of which you are a victim, and the result is great misery.

As the Buddha said,

“Pubbe hanati attana, paccha hanati so pare”^{xi}

[before killing another, one kills oneself].

Do not accept these words because they have been said by an enlightened person, or by your teacher; this will not help you at all. When you start realising the truth of the interaction of mind and matter inside yourself, it will become so clear. You will recognise that you have started harming yourself before harming someone else. And no-one wishes to do that.

If unintentionally you place your hand in a burning fire, it hurts you. After repeating the same mistake a few times, you will stop doing it because you know it hurts.

In the same way, if you start experiencing the truth inside³/₄ the truth which is to be accepted not merely intellectually or emotionally or devotionally, but at the actual level³/₄ you realise that you become miserable when you generate anger, passion, or egotism. If you keep realising this repeatedly, you will start abstaining from that type of action because you know it is not good for you.

We do not want to harm ourselves, but we keep doing so out of ignorance because we do not know the truth within. The truth outside is an apparent truth; it is only one dimension of the truth. You may think that you are unhappy because of things outside because of other people who are behaving wrongly, or because of an unpleasant external situation. This is all apparent truth³/₄ in other words, truth seen from only one angle or in only one dimension. It is not the whole truth, but only a partial truth and partial truth is a distorted truth, far away from the actual truth. When you see the truth from different angles, you start understanding the totality of the truth. And when you do, every decision you make will be a healthy decision; it will be good for you and for others.

Conclusion

If somebody has abused, insulted or misbehaved towards you, you become miserable. You may think you are miserable because of the abuse, insults or misbehaviour of that other person. At the apparent level this is true, but not at the deepest level.

*‘DHARAN KARE TO DARAM H, VARANA KORI BAAT,
SURAJ UGE TO ROSHNI, VARANA ANDHERI RATT’^{xii}*

It means that whenever we follow the dhamma, we accept rules of the nature then dhamma secure us in all ways.

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ⁱ <http://www.vridhamma.org/Research>

ⁱⁱ Dharma (masc. & neut.) ,Sayana on Rgveda, 3.17.1

ⁱⁱⁱ Turner, Ralph 1939, entry #6753 in "A comparative and etymological dictionary of the Indo-Aryan Languages; <http://dsal.uchicago.edu/dictionaries/soas/>

^{iv} (Mahavagga-parva on Digha-nikaya 1.17.17)

^v "[The Dhamma](#)". buddhanet. Retrieved May 13, 2013.

^{vi} Sanyutta-nikaya, 12.4.5

^{vii} Angguttara-nikaya, 4.7.7

^{viii} K Chandirimani, S.K. Verma, P.L. Dhar & N. Aggarwal, "Psychological Effects of Vipassana on Tihar Jail Inmates: A Preliminary Report", Vipassana—Its Relevance to the Modern World, an International Seminar, April 1994. Vipassana Research Institute, Igatpuri.

^{ix} Radhakrishnan, S. The Dhammapada, Oxford University Press, London, 1950, verse 183.

^x Dhar, P.L. and R.R. Gaur. Science and Humanism—Towards a Unified World View, Commonwealth publishers, New Delhi, 1992

^{xi} Theragatha, VRI, NASIK, IGATPURI

^{xii} Pravachan saransha, VRI, NASIK IGATPURI