



The Dharma Lakshanas of Sage Manu: **Ten Secrets for Living a Virtuous Life** Part One by Swami Jyotirmayananda

Dharma, ordinarily translated as virtue, righteousness, or ethical conduct, has many implications and is a most significant term in Hindu culture and philosophy. The scriptures say, “*Yato Dharmas Tato Jayah*”—“Wherever there is *dharma* there is victory.”

Great Sage Manu gave ten characteristics of *dharma* in Manu Smriti, a Hindu scripture. These ten are referred to as *Dharma Lakshanas*. In fact, they are the basis for righteousness in every religion of the world. One should meditate upon these characteristics and try to develop them:

- 1 *Dhriti*—firmness
- 2 *Kshama*—forgiveness, forbearance
- 3 *Dama*—control of the senses
- 4 *Asteya*—nonstealing
- 5 *Shaucha*—purity of body and mind
- 6 *Atma Vinigraha*—control of the mind
- 7 *Dhee*—purity of intellect
- 8 *Vidya*—knowledge
- 9 *Satya*—truthfulness
- 10 *Akrodha*—absence of anger

1. THE VIRTUE OF DHRITI—FIRMNESS

Dhriti means firmness or persistence. If you make a resolve to accomplish something, then

come what may, you should be able to pursue that project to its completion. Even if someone criticizes you or tries to discourage you, do not be affected; rather, move on towards your goal in an undaunted manner.

Dhriti is especially important when you are doing something good, for that is when you should never allow yourself to become discouraged. In pursuing what is good you must be firm and strong.

However, you should not be firm about pursuing negative things. If people you know start developing bad habits, do not pursue those habits with them. Firmness is for positive things.



The Transformation of Kalidas



I will give you a humorous story that shows the power of *dhriti*:

Kalidas is known as one of the greatest scholars of Sanskrit literature, but in his early days he was more dull-witted than you can imagine! When he was a young man, there was a princess in his country who was highly intelligent, who had acquired much literary and scriptural knowledge, and who had become a great Sanskrit scholar. When she reached the age for marriage, her father announced that only someone who was equal to or greater than her in knowledge could become her husband.

Many young scholars tried to win her hand, but she defeated them all in philosophical discussions. Some suitors who felt particularly humiliated and upset by this defeat decided to teach her a lesson. So they put their heads together and plotted to find an extremely stupid person and trick the princess into marrying him.

During their search, they found a good-looking young man who was sitting on a branch of a tree, busily cutting the same branch upon which he was seated! They realized that here was the stupidest man they could hope to find. So they beckoned him to come down and asked him if he would like to marry the princess. He loved the idea, but asked how it could possibly happen. They told him that all he would have to do was to keep quiet and not speak a word. However, he could make all the gestures he wanted with his hands.

So these people brought the dull-wit into the palace and presented him in the royal court as the greatest philosopher and Sage of the time. They said that he was so advanced that he didn't even have to use words. In silence, just by gestures, he could convey the highest philosophy. They challenged the princess to debate with him in the same language of silent gestures, or else accept defeat.

The princess accepted the challenge, and they both sat down, ready to begin the unusual debate. The princess raised one finger, implying, "Can you refute that there is only one God, one Absolute?"

The dull-wit, seeing that raised finger, thought that the princess was going to poke his eye. So he thought, "Let me poke both of hers." And he raised two fingers.

The scheming scholars interpreted this for the princess, saying, "O princess, our scholar friend is more advanced than you are. Although *Brahman* is One, one alone cannot create and sustain this world. *Brahman* must have *Maya* (Cosmic Illusion) to do so." Hearing this, the princess accepted defeat on this point and went on to another.

She then raised her hand, showing five fingers, implying that the world is made up of five ele-

ments or five *tattwas*. Seeing her hand raised, this dull-wit thought that she was going to slap him. He said to himself, "If she tries to slap me, I am going to punch her!" So he made a fist.

The philosophers interpreted this, saying, "The princess asserts that five elements make the world. But if the five elements are apart like her fingers, how can those elements go to form the world? This Sage is advanced. With his fist he shows that the five elements must come together." The princess again had to accept defeat.

In this way, those scholars succeeded in getting the young man married to the princess. It was not difficult, however, for the princess to find out that he was indeed a dull-wit. The moment she realized this, she told him to get out and not come back until he was deserving of being married to her—in other words, not until he became the scholar that all his friends had made him out to be.

So, that young man left her with a sense of tremendous sorrow. Deeply hurt, he thought, "I who am such a dull-wit, how can I be the scholar that the princess is expecting me to be? It is impossible." Thus thinking, he sat down by a well with the idea of jumping into it to commit suicide.

But as he sat looking into the well, he noticed that the walls had deeply entrenched grooves, made by the rope as it rubbed against the concrete wall every time people drew water. So, he thought to himself, "If by persistent rubbing even concrete gives way and changes, what will happen to my mind if I persist? I do want to be a scholar, well-cultured and intelligent. So why can't I, too, change?" With that resolve he became a devotee of Goddess Kali, and with sustained perseverance began studying under a great scholar. Eventually he became Kalidas—one of the greatest poets, writers, dramatists, and literary scholars of the Sanskrit language.

That firmness of resolve is what we refer to as *dhriti*. If you set your mind to something and refuse to be discouraged, you are bound to suc-

ceed. The eternal Self or Supreme Soul within you is inexhaustible in Its energy and resources. Nothing is impossible for you.

Books of ordinary psychology may tell you that your mind can advance only to a certain extent. But that is not so. There is no limit to your capacity. If you know the subtle mystic art, you can bring out amazing talents and powers from within yourself.

With *dhriti*, you develop a strong-metalled personality and strive to accomplish your goals, regardless of the obstacles along the way, and no matter what may be the odds against your success. If things do not turn out the way you expect, you do not relent, but patiently continue to put forth your best effort. With persistence, eventually you will succeed.

There is another special type of firmness or *dhriti* that helps you translate theoretical knowledge into practical knowledge. If you lack this type of *dhriti*, you hear wonderful things through one ear but it passes right out through the other!

Parable of the Three Skulls

Once a man brought three skulls before a great king and posed a riddle: Which of the three was the wisest when alive? All the great scholars and philosophers in the court looked at the skulls and said that they could not know which one was the wisest just by seeing the skull.

However, one philosopher took the skulls and tried a demonstration with three straws. He poked the first straw into the ear of the first skull and let it pass out through the other ear. At this, the philosopher said, “This one was the dumbest. Whatever he listened to in one ear passed right out the other.”

Then he poked the second straw into the ear of the second skull and he let it pass out through the mouth. He said, “This one was of medium class wisdom. He heard so many things, but he just went on talking about what he had learned without assimilating any of it.”

Then he poked the third straw into the third skull and let it pass through the ear down towards the stomach. “This man was the wisest,” said the philosopher. “He digested and assimilated all that he learned.”

The story shows that if you have developed *dhriti* you possess the type of mind that listens, retains, and assimilates. *Dhriti* should be of a *satwic* (pure) nature. You should be able to retain that which is sublime, not that which is *rajasic* (impure) or *tamasic* (dull). If you have *dhriti*, then whatever you learn will become effective in your life. If you lack *dhriti*, you simply learn things theoretically, but that theoretical knowledge is never put into practice.

2. THE VIRTUE OF KSHAMA— FORGIVENESS

Kshama means forgiveness or forbearance. Even when you are placed in a provocative situation, you should continue to maintain a mind that is serene, without developing ill will towards those who provoke you.

For example, when a doctor approaches a patient, that patient, due to mental disbalance, may say many harsh things to the doctor. The doctor doesn't care. The doctor knows that because his patient is ill, he will shout, cry, and be impatient. These are the expressions of his disease. So therefore, no matter how badly the patient may behave, the doctor continues to try to help him. That same mature attitude must characterize all your dealings with other people. No matter what happens, there must be constant forbearance.



Rescuing the Drowning Scorpion

Once a saintly person entered into a river and found a scorpion drowning. As he tried to rescue the scorpion, the animal stung him. His hand shook from the pain, and the scorpion fell. Again he tried to pick it up, and again the scorpion stung him.

Someone by the bank of the river laughed at the saint, saying, “Why are you doing this? Throw that scorpion down. Crush it.” The saint replied, “The scorpion is maintaining his *dharma* (duty), which is to go on stinging me. Why should I not maintain my *dharma*, which is to go on trying to protect him?”

Similarly, in this world you face different types of personalities, some of whom sting like scorpions. No matter how you try to help them, you get stung! Still, you must maintain your *dharma* (duty). Don’t use your energy to judge the actions of others, nor to decide what they should or should not do. Rather, look within yourself, decide how you should act, and then do so. “*Yato Dharmas Tato Jayah*”—“Where there is *dharma* or righteousness, there is victory.” If you have forbearance, you will find that people around you will change for the better, and that the change will be of a lasting nature.

If you want to be great, you must understand that there are two types of strength: strength of muscles and strength of ethics. Strength of ethics implies doing what is good even when you are provoked, all the while knowing that God is behind that strength.



The Monkeys and the Bull

Buddhist literature tells how Buddha attained perfection passing through many embodiments. In each embodiment he learned a lesson. In one of his incarnations, Buddha was a mighty bull in a forest—and although a bull, his spirit was very spiritually advanced.

One day a band of wild monkeys began to tease him. Some jumped around on his back; some started scratching his ears; some bit his horns; some played with his tail, etc.

At first the bull thought, “Let me shake those pesty creatures off and crush them.” But then he reflected more deeply upon the matter and thought, “After all, these monkeys are having fun, and I

am not going to die from all this. They are simply annoying me. If I retaliate they will be seriously injured. Furthermore, isn’t it better to control anger than to take revenge?” By reflecting in this manner, the bull was able to remain quietly passive and overpower his anger.

At that moment, some celestial beings passing by observed the conduct of the bull and were amazed! They said to the bull, “Why don’t you kill those monkeys?” And the bull said, “It would be easy for me to kill them, but I realize that there is greater virtue in controlling anger. It is a better form of heroism to kill anger than to revenge upon others. Those monkeys have given me the opportunity of discovering my strength over my own lower self. Because of this, I am indebted to the monkeys.”

As the story implies, physical strength is little compared to moral strength, to the strength of virtue. And that moral strength develops when you control anger, hate, and expressions of retaliation.

If someone insults you, instead of trying to hurt the person or to revenge upon him, try to maintain goodwill. If you can talk with the person and make them understand, that would be ideal. But if you cannot reason with the person, then simply pray in silence for their well-being. No matter what happens, learn the art of endurance, and internally do not hold any ill will.

It is easy for anybody in the world to follow the philosophy of “tit-for tat” or “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth”—to revenge upon anyone who harms you. But it is a greater virtue not to seek revenge, but to endure and forgive through the development of inner strength.

If you restrain anger, hate, and jealousy and instead promote compassion, understanding, and love, you become a highly advanced person. The capacity to forgive is a mark of internal greatness. But if you react in the same way as the average person, you remain at a very low level—for there is no end to taking revenge. The disharmony continues without end.

(to be continued)