

Society and Politics in Spiritual Culture – A Vedic Vision*

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Spiritual Culture

In general, the term ‘culture’ of a race, nation, community, society, organization, institution or a group refers to its characteristic human knowledge, belief, and behavior (shared values, attitudes and practices). It basically depends upon the capacity of the specific entity for assimilation of knowledge, thinking and social learning in a space-time continuum. The term ‘spiritual,’ on the other hand refers to belief in the idea that all life, environment and the universe are interconnected by the same spirit. In other words, the ultimate reality is immaterial ‘spirit’ at the core of the universe, physical phenomena and all life. Spirituality is often experienced by some human beings as a source of inspiration or orientation in life. Whereas, spirituality is traditionally imparted through the various religions, spiritual culture is its assimilation in practice.

Spiritual culture is the collective mindfulness of a community of people of different races and faiths in accepting a common origin for all existence. In a spiritual culture, human awareness rises to a level that human fulfillment does not depend upon material possession alone, but equal satisfaction is derived by caring for the other and serving the other humans beings and the environment. For regard of this point of view, people in a spiritual culture accept and practice those actions, attitudes and behaviors in their endeavors as not to adversely impact the other life and the environment. The spiritual culture promotes harmony and provides the only basis for universal love, peace and prosperity.

Living in a spiritual culture, we can change someone's life for the better. Our spiritually imbued points of view and courageous actions can lift our friends’ and relatives’ outlook on life. Our compassion and support can help find a satisfying answer for those struggling with personal problems, such as sickness, disease or poverty. We will spend time and listen to those who need sympathy. We will open up our hearts for others and the environment. **Spiritual culture is the hallmark of a peaceful and stable society.**

Society and Politics in Spiritual Culture

Spirituality sees equality of all communities and states. Both material and spiritual pursuits have the same purpose if we put the interest of the society and the nation first, rather than the individual. However, the very reminder of that goal in the execution of a

law makes it spiritual. Spirituality guides the free-will actions, in accordance with

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moral values such as honesty, integrity, and service to make a harmonious society or nation by building good character that will protect and preserve a harmonious nation.

Politics is one of the most effective avenues for social change. It potentially influences the material and economic resources for communities and states. But, the political force ceases to be spiritual if it is swayed by: arrogance to uphold the interests of the party above that of the nation, and greed to promote the interests of the influencing groups rather than the nation. The main stumbling blocks against the pursuit of spirituality in politics are the distortion of truth in favor of a minority of powerful big businesses and corporations and disregard for the unspoken voices of the majority. The answer may lie in making elections fair so that worthy candidates can be elected not because they are able to raise funds, but because they have the interest of the nation at heart.

The spiritualized politics will create a good conscience, a will to maintain justice and freedom for the good of the people. The Vedic way of living offers one of the most effective practices to bring about spiritual culture in politics and society. Before we begin to analyze ways of bringing spiritual culture into our lives we need to know what drives human beings. In short, what are the goals of human life?

Goals of Human Life

The *Vedic* system proposes four goals for human life. These are *dharma*, *artha*, *kama*, and *moksha*. The first goal, *dharma* means that which sustains the person, family or the nation. More accurately it indicates the inherent quality in a person or object. For example, the *dharma* of fire is heat and light. The *dharma* of water is its liquidity. *Dharma* typically means to live one's life purpose. Therefore, *dharma* of an individual refers to the unique way in which one establishes harmony within oneself and the environment. Whereas, living in *dharma* brings satisfaction and happiness, it may not always be easy to find our *dharma* in life. Generally, we learn our *dharma* from our experiences and introspection.

Dharma also has jurisdiction on all **stages of life** (*Brahmcharya* – the life of a student to earn education or an apprentice to learn a skill to make a living; *Grihastha* – the life of a householder to raise a family and care about the family and the society; *Vanprastha* – beginning the life of contemplation by loosening of bond with the family and profession; and *Sannyasa* – giving up the worldly life in favor of meditation on God, great men, scriptures and the holy books. Some *dharmic* (pertaining to *dharma*) goals seem more suited to different stages of life than others. For instance, during the householder stage of

life one may have opportunities to serve on the city council, be active in civic organizations, or even become a politician to render public service.

Dharma is the practice of righteousness, the living of an ethically and traditionally correct life. The understanding and acceptance of 'what is right,' however depends upon individual culture, which comes from one's family, community and the country. The most important act of righteousness is to fulfill *kartavya* (the duties) assigned to one's **station in life** in the society (the *Brahmins* – teachers and priests; the *Kshatriyas* – the kings, rulers, defense and the military, etc.; the *Vaishyas* – businessmen, merchants and farmers, etc.; and the *Shudras* – peasants, laborers, butchers, barbers, janitors, etc.) and stage of life. Each must do their duty to the best of their ability. The duty must be performed correctly, efficiently and effectively. A student, for instance may not cheat during a test, a householder may not covet any other person besides their spouse, each becoming righteous through a different set of actions. Thus a merchant or a trader may market a product by completely revealing the details and not make an overly profit. The laborer, on the other hand, may not cut corners in rendering his service.

The two goals that naturally come to all human beings are *Artha* and *Kama*. *Artha* is the pursuit of actions pertaining to security, such as gathering wealth and power. In any station in life one must work one's profession to earn a living and provide for the security of one's family. This means providing a house to live, food to eat, and a secure job to meet the needs of one's family members. The extent of security must be exercised properly. If we crave more money and things than we actually need, we become selfish and greedy, which are the biggest impediments to grow spiritually. On the other hand, if we ignore security as non-spiritual, we can become dependent on others at the loss of a job, which may not allow us to fulfill our *dharma* or life purpose. However, if we pursue *artha* with *dharma*, we become responsible for our lives and simultaneously are able to fulfill our needs.

Kama is the pursuit of pleasure and enjoyment of the senses. This pursuit recognizes the need for pleasure to maintain physical and mental health. Enjoyment of the senses relate to the object of the senses, such as visiting beautiful sights, listening to soothing music, smelling of fragrant flowers, enjoying delicious foods and feeling a relaxing massage, etc. Depending upon one's natural disposition, one may take part, support, or just appreciate any one or more forms of pleasure, such as art, music, dance, drama, literature, poetry, sports and travel. Throughout the ages, many religions and cultures have debated and expressed different views about *kama*. According to the Vedic view, bodily pleasure must be controlled to grow spiritually. On the other hand, any pleasure taken to the extreme may hurt oneself or the others involved. The basic principle is to have a balanced amount of pleasure and enjoyment in life. This helps us to stay healthy and responsive to fulfill our *dharma*.

Both, *Artha* and *Kama* should be performed within the realm of *dharma* (in a righteous manner). It is more important to follow *dharma* and call it a successful pursuit than follow unlawful means to grow more wealth or be able to enjoy more and call it an achievement. For example selling a lot of ‘something’ is acceptable so long as that ‘something’ is not purchased illegally and one does not increase the price with increasing demand. *Artha* should be pursued for the maintenance and protection of the self and the family so long as there is no **greed** associated with the pursuit. In the same manner, *kama* should be pursued so long as there is no attachment to the object of the senses and *kama* does not turn into **lust** and delusion of the mind. **Both, greed and lust degrade our life to a state of lower existence.** In this state, we lose our capacity of rational thinking, and thus cease to be human beings. If not checked, both greed and lust can turn into major social and national problems in destabilizing the society that can bring the mightiest of empires to ruin.

The fourth and the final goal of life is *moksha*. It is the pursuit of freedom from the physical, mental, and emotional bondage, which is only possible through release from *samsara*, the endless cycle of life and death. Commitment to a *dharmic* (righteous, following the laws) lifestyle may help in achieving this goal. It is suitable for those, who do not find satisfaction in the pursuit of *artha* and *kama* alone. They have realized that the life of *artha* and *kama* is full of suffering and are looking for permanent peace. However, a person desiring *moksha* does not have to turn away from *artha* or *kama*, rather pursue those actions without attachment. When we are true to ourselves, we become inwardly free and grow spiritually. To achieve this goal, one may gradually develop disciplines that are conducive to *dharmic* life. Also, one may perform actions because they need to be done rather than taking the ownership of actions. Therefore, *moksha* is the pursuit of spiritual liberation.

The State of Our Human Family

The great Vedic dictum states, “*Vasudeva Kutumbkam* – We are one human family.” In the Vedic vision, we are a family, without boundaries of race, religion, culture, nation, or gender connected together through a cord of human values. We are a family comprising of parents, grandparents, and their in-laws; siblings and their in-laws; aunts, uncles and their in-laws; children and their in-laws; and just as one President Barack Obama is connected to Indonesia and Kenya thru his siblings, so are all of us from all over the world connected together through siblings and in-laws of different faiths, races and cultures.

However, in this extended family of ours, nearly half of the human family lives in crushing poverty, thousands of children die each day from disease and starvation, many of our family members are exploits of industrial growth and are innocent victims of our failure to protect the environment, there are many who pay a heavy price of being uprooted from family homes to start afresh due to wars being fought for reasons they have no clue, and then there are others we regard as terrorists, some of who are

misinformed and kill with blind faith, some have given up hope in life and think that by killing have nothing to lose, and some employ means of retaliation that are inferior in quality and lack precision.

In spite of our scientific, technological, and medical accomplishments there is very little to show towards gross injustice of enormous proportions to our neglected family. If we do not respond, we would be breaking the cord of human values that make us human. What follows would be a whirlwind of chaos, increasing lawlessness and disorder.

We've created a value system in which it is 'wealth' and not 'care' for the fellow man that assures status in society. Therefore, it negates forming of a spiritual culture. Paradoxically, we call ourselves civilized. Our social institutions value wealth as a parameter for success, disregarding sensitivity to the fellow human being. We are attached to money more than our duty towards parents, siblings, friends, spouses and children. While attachment to money and wealth is an individual action, using money as a means of trade is a community value. To climb up the social ladder we lie, cheat and disregard the only virtue that separates us from the lower life forms. And that takes us away from the values that make us human beings.

Human Values

The origin of human values is the source at the core of our beings. The source being non-physical, non-material, without any attributes and qualities introduces values through *Rita*, the universal order. The order does not delimit importance of one element of manifestation over the other, but provides an avenue for the universe to sustain itself. That order is called *dharma*. From that order follow the objective laws that govern the physical universe and the subjective laws that govern human beings. Consider for instance, if the sun decides not to shine any longer, or the earth decides not to revolve around the sun; there would be no world and life that we know of. Revolving around the sun, the earth does not diminish its role, but follows intrinsic value in the performance of the universal order. Similarly, the roles of a child and a wife in a family are not inferior or superior to the father or the husband, so long as all follow their intrinsic values in the performance of the family order. The same goes with any relationship: the employer/employee; teacher/student and the friends alike. All human values follow from the universal order.

Based on *rita* and *dharma*, every religion has a set of core values. Some quote scriptures when they talk about moral values. Others talk about virtues and principles. The truth is simply this, "Human values are not to be gotten through a text, nor can they be supplied by any business undertaking. They do not come as wrapped gifts by friends nor can they be purchased from a store. They are our natural responses that come from the heart. Human values are present in us as naturally as our blood, and correspondingly, they flow in the human community by way of our conduct with the other person, just as

blood flows naturally in our veins. Human values should not be disregarded by human objectives in the achievement of economic, political and social goals. They are stand-alone codes of conduct to treat another with regard and consideration.

Important Issues for Human Beings

The most important question for human beings is why we don't want to live in peace and harmony among each other and with nature. Other important questions include why we aren't concerned about: the fast depletion of arable land for growing uncontaminated food; pollution of life-giving water and air; growing ecological problems, such as the reality of global warming, shrinking forests, disappearing wetlands, eroding soil, extinction of many species affecting ecological balance; unnecessary wars, economy, poverty and increasing wealth gap among the *Haves* and *Have-nots*; and in spite of tremendous advances in science and technology, we live under constant stress of producing and achieving, mental imbalance and physical pain.

Two of the most important factors that compromise our ability to properly and correctly address the issues we face are the man-made divisions in politics and society of the powerful and the powerless and economics of the global trade. However, unjustified wars, disproportionate wealth-gaps, public health, and fair governance remain other related factors.

The powerful and the powerless

The modern day democracies have a system of checks and balances within the constitution. The constitutional law is no different from the establishment of *dharma*. However, *dharma* is ensured only when there are provisions in the constitution restraining the exercise of supremacy by any one of the divisions of the government or influence by a segment of society. The only way to prevent the abuse of power is if the government makes decision for the country without influence from the lobbyists serving the interest groups. Otherwise, the government cannot ensure equal protection under the law to the subjects without discrimination. The only way to ensure that a nation will not polarize into the two groups (of *Haves* and *Have nots* and/or the powerful and the powerless) is if the government protects the laws and conforms to the laws as well. It is possible if *dharma* is the supreme law of the state where the elected leaders and subjects alike are ruled by the same law and responsibility is afforded based on one's *swadharma* (responsibility based on education, experience and accumulated skills).

Dharma enters into the government through *kshatriya dharma* that establishes equal law for all. *Kshatriya dharma* calls for development of appropriate policies so as to be not influenced by interest groups which may compromise greater interest for all citizens. The elected heads of the states and other leaders must abide by *dharma*. It is only when they live in *dharma* and rule by *dharma* that people will live in *dharma* also. Therefore, it

is the highest responsibility of the people to elect only those people who possess the highest moral and ethical values. Only then all citizens can expect equal justice. According to *Manusmruti*, “Just as the mother Earth gives an equal support to all living beings, a king or a President must give support to his subject without discrimination.”

In the great epic *Ramayana*, Lord *Raama* was the ideal king. *Raama Rajya* (an ideal system of government governed by a constitution that was *dharma*) provided each citizen a framework to fulfill to their highest potential in their pursuits of *dharma*, *artha* and *kaama*. Lord *Rama* embodied *dharma* by the performance of his responsibilities and in his *vyavahara* (conduct). He was an ideal son, an ideal husband and an ideal ruler. That is why Lord *Rama* is the ideal person to aspire for by every student, every son, every husband, and every ruler. Many rulers have aspired to emulate Lord *Rama* and to establish *Rama Rajya* for their governments in rendering social justice and in regulating the affairs of the state, but human failings have kept them from fulfilling their objectives.

Wars, Global Trade and *Dharma*

History is replete with stories of wars for ideology, faith, territorial disputes and sharing of resources. Only, wars fought for fairness, justice and the protection of equitable rights are *dharma*. One cannot kill *atman* (the soul), so killing *sharira* (body that is perishable) for a bigger cause, such as the family, society, country and humanity is *dharma*. Today, two of the major forces responsible for wars are: the forces of terrorism deployed against the powerful to disrupt their normal lifestyle and the global trade, and the forces of powerful countries trying to enforce their ideology and law and order based on that ideology. What is at stake is our common need for clean air, potable water, food, fuel for transportation and power. Global scarcity of water and oil and/or its distribution has increased risk for global conflicts, especially the poor nations and the disenfranchised poor people. Political violence often erupts from border disputes or scarce natural resources and/or shortages in needed commodities. *Dharma* dictates that the conflicting parties to sit side by side to establish specific law and order to satisfy the needs for each group through discussions, debates, conferences and diplomacy.

Whereas, the intent of the global trade is to increase productivity of developing countries and increase competition that will result in lowering costs, in the interim, however, it has resulted in polarizing the trading countries into the rich and the poor, and making the gap bigger than before. Workers, in the laboring communities and countries, are being exposed to degraded environment, and the poor countries have to devalue their currencies to compete. Moreover, many local businesses such as cottage industries, truck farming, and cultural products are fast going out-of-business in favor of big corporations. *Dharma* enters into the global trade through *Vaishya dharma* (right conduct in business and trade) that sets the terms for the highest good for all trading partners. *Vaishya dharma* calls for development of appropriate policies for those workers who are adversely affected among the trading partners through discussions, debates, conferences and

diplomacy. *Vaishya dharma* encourages free trade for consumer goods among trading communities just as in supermarkets or flea markets where a common person can trade at different levels of buying capacity. What is *dharma*?

Dharma

Law and order, duty, righteous conduct, religious principles, engagement and enjoyment in religion, the code of ethics, justice, compassion, truthfulness, discipline, social merit, cleanliness, and one's natural occupation all comprise *dharma* in space-time continuum. It is by living a life of *dharma* that each element of the world, human beings and the environment, is connected with each other and provides ways and means to live together in harmony for collective growth. Dynamics of *Dharma* is always in tune with the social pulse and offers a conscious choice for an individual to live in harmony with the rest of the environment. Therefore, in the today's polarized world of the *Haves* and *Have-nots*, and the powerful and powerless, while we must share our resources in global trade to fulfill our common need for food, water and energy, *dharma* offers the single most effective choice for global peace and a sustainable society. The Vedic tradition can steer us to reinstate *dharma*.

The Vedic Vision

The Vedic tradition is also called *Sanatana Dharma* (the eternal precept). *Sanatana Dharma* offers practical approaches for its adoption in different family traditions, business transactions and trade practices, under all social and political conditions. *Sanatana Dharma* provides *achar* (conduct based on norms and traditions) and *vyavahar* (manners and code of conduct during human interaction) during the human endeavors for *artha* (wealth and security) and *kama* (pleasure and enjoyment) in the conduct of governance and rule, law and order, education, business, trade, science, philosophy, law, agriculture, performing arts, and other orders of society. All actions performed according to *dharma* in space-time continuum provide the natural course with the least impact on the environment. *Sanatana Dharma* provides human beings the techniques of the 'Right Attitude' and the 'Right Action' to achieve continued preservation and growth. What is the right attitude and what is the right action?

The 'Right Attitude' is a sense of gratitude for those you receive from, forgiveness for all with misguided words and actions that bother you, and contentment in all that you have and cannot change. The 'Right Action' is service of the less fortunate, loving others, and not hurting others; it is an action, which needs to be done. There is no ambiguity in the definition, and the perspective becomes clear when we begin to do what we need to do. *Sanatana Dharma* focuses not merely on individual interest, but provides the most appropriate human attitudes and human actions for the most optimal political, social and economic way of life as well as the environment.

The most plausible solution to develop the ‘right attitude’ and perform the ‘right action’ for social, political and economic injustice is through education in ‘yoga.’ And yoga must start at the young age. Children must be given necessary education for developing their physical and mental health and the teaching of human values. They must be provided factual information on the society and the environment to help develop sensitivity for the other human beings and the environment. This way we can restore the moral fiber of society and bring back the Vedic way of life by living in accordance with *dharma*.

Living in *dharma* alone can bring human values into our conduct with the others and the environment. Only yoga can bring about total transformation at all levels of human existence including the body, mind and spiritual awareness to live in accordance with *dharma*. Yoga affords us to have physical health, mental balance and clear thinking so that we can create fair governance free from conflicts and wars in world in which everyone contributes based on their personal nature and acquired skills.

What is Yoga?

We live in a world of fragmented perspectives in which we divide the whole into parts, analyze each the part to its minutest details and rationalize, and in the process we move away from the whole, the very source. It is only in putting the parts together that we can know the whole possible only by deemphasizing the need for separating the parts from the whole. The process detaches us from our likes and dislikes and takes us away from the world of senses and the ego that separates us from the whole. The process also takes our awareness from the thoughts of many parts exhibiting diversity of form and function that we perceive during wakefulness into the focused thought of the underlying unity that we experience during meditation just as in the thoughtlessness of sleep. The disconnectedness of a single part (our likes and dislikes) gets resolved in the completeness of the whole and we move from the thrill of passion into the quintessence of bliss. It rejuvenates our body, mind and soul. It is called yoga.

Irrespective of our race, faith, culture, gender or national origin, all of us want to avoid pain, suffering and sorrow and attain a state of everlasting joy, the state of bliss. The state of bliss is to be found when we are complete in ourselves with no demand. The sages of yore discovered that to be the ultimate aim of life – to attain perfection (in any endeavor including governance or social life). This discovery was later systematized into a series of practices that lead us from untruth to truth, from ignorance to light, and from death and mortality to immortality. Immortality is a state free from sorrow and suffering – a state of completeness or perfection – total bliss. This system was handed down to posterity as Yoga. Yoga is the practical method of attaining this state of bliss.

The Vedic tradition was not meant for one community or one country, but for the whole humankind. That is why it was a universal civilization concerned with the good of

humanity at large. We can still avoid future individual, societal and global suffering through the moral and ethical purity of our present actions. Practice of yoga can help eliminate all social ills and create a system of good governance, a society with good health, and a world free of conflicts.

Vedic Perspective on Good Governance

The human society at large comprises human beings with diverse physical attributes, natures and skills and with disparity in their social and economical status. Consequently, the need for peaceful coexistence and living in harmony existed since beginning. According to *Sanaatana Dharma* the highest state of society to live in harmony, all must live in *dharmā* (order). The basis for Raama *Raajya* is to be found in *Sanaatana Dharma* which offers the highest state of society sustained by *dharmā* alone as described in the following verse:

*Na raajyam na cha raajaaseet na cha daandikah;
Dharmenaiva prajaassarvaa rakshanti sma parasparam.*

(There existed no state, no king, no criminal and no penalty. All protected one another by virtue of *dharmā*.)

Good governance is assured when the nation and not the partisan interests are considered for discussion, legislation and execution. And that calls for a single party with the main goal of affording ‘one law for all’ to provide for the health, education and welfare of all citizens who contribute based on their natural talents, education and acquired skills. Good governance also assures that ecology and the environment are protected in all business activities and trade. Good governance must also provide for the defense of the nation from bad elements outside and within the country as well. It must organize military and police to uphold law and order, impart justice and maintain peace. In the ultimate sense, only one world order can maintain a world without national conflicts or wars.

The external authority of a king is not needed for a society in which the individuals are bound by the practice of right conduct. During our interaction with the environment, it is the right conduct alone that makes us sensitive to the needs of the other and bonds us with others without any element of selfishness. Care for the other leads to harmonious living in the sense that each person takes for his services only what is fair, consumes what is needed, and therefore, protects the share of the other. Overindulgence in the pursuit of desires degrades human beings to the level of animals. It is *dharmā* alone that elevates us in awareness, which separates us from the animals. An organized society cannot be sustained without *dharmā*. *Dharma* is the very strength that binds individuals in a society. Seeing the self in the other, without any distinction of national origin, color, race and faith, is *dharmā*.

Vedic Perspective on Good Health

There is no better way to live a quality life without disease than that offered by the principles of *Ayurveda* and *Patanjali's Ashtanga Yoga*. *Ayurveda* (the science of life) is the Vedic, world's oldest, most perfect and most comprehensive system of natural medicine. It is a preventive system of restoring health, and promoting longevity by preserving the body's natural state and building the body's defenses against disease and other external ingested and internally produced toxins. In addition, *Patanjali Ashtanga Yoga* is a guide for living the right life through its eight limbs.

Patanjali Yoga offers moral and ethical development through five orders of *Yama* (moral principles) and five disciplines of *Niyama* (codes of conduct). The remaining limbs are: *Asana* (postures for physical health), *Pranayama* (breathing exercises for eliminating mental disturbance), *Pratyahara* (practice of sense withdrawal for discouraging greed and lust), *Dharana* (concentration to achieve goals), *Dhyana* (meditation for spiritual awareness) and *Samadhi* (for realizing the truth).

Vedic Perspective on Peace

Recognizing and understanding that universal peace is possible when all elements of manifestation are at peace by the sheer will of human beings, it is to our collective benefit to explore the process that may channel human energy to establish and maintain peace. In fact, we sprang from peace and we'll merge in peace. To establish peace, our actions must be in tune with the *Sanaatana Dharma*. That is why the Vedas teach us to give up malice and hatred.

- Give up hatred. *Rig Veda: VI 10.7*
- May we not hate any one! *Atharva Veda: XII 1.24*
- It is the most heinous sin to slay the innocent. *Atharva Veda: X 1.29*
- O Lord, firm and resolute, make me firm; May all look at me with friendly eye.
May I look at all with friendly eye; May all look at one another with friendly eye.
Yajur Veda: 36,18
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Beliefs, attitudes and actions interact to produce peace or violence. The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* (ii, 6; iv, 4) reads, "Here they say that a person consists of desires. And as is his desire, so is his will. And as is his will, so will be his deed; and whatever deed he does, that he will reap." Every belief creates certain attitudes. Those attitudes govern all of our actions. Man's actions can thus be traced to his inmost beliefs about himself and about the world around him. If those beliefs are erroneous, his actions will not be in tune with the *Sanaatana Dharma*.

Whereas an appropriate resolution can be offered once the cause is known, *Vedas* offer some basic value system that affords means so that conflict may not even occur. The real answer lies in following *rita* (natural law and order) and *dharma* (code of conduct in

human interactions). *Rita* appears as intent to follow the law and order; and *dharma* is satisfied by rendering individual duties.

*Om maa bhraataa bhraatram dvikshan maa swasaaramutasvasaa,
Samayam chah saptataa bhootvaa vaacham vadata bhadryaa.*

May we have good understanding with our neighbors and the members of our community! May our intellect lead us along the path of righteousness and generate the attitude of truth, service and cooperation in us.

Vedas have long professed, *Aatmavat sarvabhooteshu* – Look upon all beings as your own self.

The conflicts originate because of perceived differences in the mind. It is in the mind alone that the differences are perceived. Therefore, in the mind alone one can reconcile differences. The mind should be prepared to accept the benefits of peace through education. Most people are still living in conditions unsuitable for developing minds to grasp the benefits of living in peace. They are ignorant about their faiths, human values, and the progress made in science, technology and medicine. Only through education, they can become attuned to the spirit of good will, cooperation, and harmonious living.

The education must prepare us with a capability to revitalize our faith in the strength of moral principles so that collectively we help restore the social order. The intent of our actions must be pursuit of individual excellence without disrupting the harmony. To achieve that goal, we must develop a mind to assimilate only the good, the auspicious and the divine. Therefore, it behooves on the education boards in all of the nations to take a clear look at the purpose of education

Purpose of Education

The purpose of education is to gain knowledge in the area of endeavor. Knowledge is gained by the transfer of information in the desired discipline. Information is the source of truth about people, objects and events. So the information on truth is the real purpose of education. According to Swami Vivekananda, education is the manifestation of perfection in human beings. Perfection in education is wisdom. Wisdom leads to oneness, unity and peace. Wisdom is not taught in schools because it is not in the curriculum.

Unlike the days of the distant yore, when children were sent to the *gurukuls* (the house of the teacher) at a very young age around 7, and would not return home until they completed their education (including wisdom), the education systems of today do not incorporate the teaching of wisdom as part of the curriculum. If we could only teach children the universal principles such as love, tolerance, and compassion from day one, both at home and at school, not only by word, but by example, by our conduct and behavior, the citizens of tomorrow would have those principles ingrained in them.

Our conduct and behavior must exemplify human values of the righteous conduct, love, nonviolence, peace and truth, which, according to Sai Baba, are the five pillars of human character. Character is built through **love and security**. While character is tested in dire situations of hunger, poverty and injustice, love and security are the only two viable means to impart any education with understanding. Children raised under the security of loving parents, who reward the children for good conduct and punish them for bad conduct grow up to be good and caring members of society. Just as at home, if reward and punishment are associated with the practice of human values in human conduct in all aspects of their interaction with the environment, people will have a motivation to practice those as well. And that would be real education.

When children are raised with love and care and sensitivity toward others in the family, in the society and the environment, they will exhibit love and care for all they come in contact with. If children are raised with a goal to excel in their natural talents and to compete in the sense of demonstrating excellence in their skills so that their excellence in their area of pursuit is in the spirit of service to the community they will correspondingly imbibe excellence in their endeavor for service to the community. If children are raised with certain disciplines and guidance they will be able to deal with any situation in life which demands the best out of them without unnecessary waste of mental energy. Such children will be more calm and peaceful. A society with such children will be more peaceful.

Finally, the purpose of education is not only to: teach the student a trade; prepare the student for productive career; enable a student to earn a good income, compete to stay ahead of the other communities or nations in technology, to preserve a particular doctrine, or to create good citizens, but **to live in peace and harmony with the rest of the environment** (people, objects and events). One effective way that one (any human being including a politician and a businessperson) freely and by one's own choice restores to righteous conduct in human interaction with others and the environment is Ayur-Living.

Ayur-Living Education

Ayur-Living is a mode of living that allows satisfaction in life by attaining perfect health compromised by the man-made environmental effects and living in harmony with one's environment (people, objects and events) altered by misinterpreted meaning of freedom. In the sense of satisfaction, perfect health implies physical wellbeing, mental balance and spiritual awareness; living in harmony suggests achieving one's potential without destabilizing the environment.

Ayur-Living begins from the basic understanding of who we are, recognizes the importance of being in harmony with the environment and prepares us to develop a sense of what a healthy body, calm mind and a sharp intellect can do to realize our natural

potential. The sense of perfect health is developed through a set of disciplined actions that allow one to activate body's natural healing processes.

When thinking is clear and no universal values are compromised, there is no basis for mistakes or sickness and no impediments for pursuits. The practice of Ayur-Living results in an increase in energy and inner strength to bring out inner beauty. It propels individuals to endeavor into realizing their fullest potential by building character and integrity without compromising *dharma* and promoting harmonious living with the environment. That is the essence of spiritual culture. One such school that provides disciplined education for the wellness of body, purification of mind, and clarity of purpose is Institute of Spiritual Healing, www.instituteofspiritualhealing.com