

## SANATAN DHARMA

From its realisation of the essential unity of the creation the Advaita Vedanta teaches that all religions spring from the same source and are, despite appearances, divided only by the rituals and dogmas arising after the initial revelation whose essential nature is always the same.

Advaita makes a practical distinction between natural laws—‘Dharma’, and man-made laws—‘Neeti’. The primary, natural laws are those given by the Absolute in order to start and maintain the Creation. An example might be the law of three and the law of octaves, these two fundamental laws interacting together on all the scales of the universe to produce the multiplicity and order of what we call the ‘laws of nature’. At a high level of consciousness it is said these laws are perceived in the same way, irrespective of the perceiver’s particular faith or culture.

The secondary, man-made laws do mostly arise from these ‘natural laws’ but are adapted and developed to accommodate the necessities of place and time, culture and tradition. Religious ritual and dogma, the codes of morality and civil and criminal law differing around the world are these man-made laws. We can discern their similarity, but more often we are aware of the striking differences which cause us a lot of difficulty, wars, crusades, prejudice and incomprehension.

The ten principles of Sanatan Dharma, literally translated as ‘the eternal inner body of truth’ are usually described as the basis of Hinduism, the code of behaviour and morality underpinning the Hindu way of life. But here too many different rituals and dogmas have sprung up over the centuries so that even in India there are widely varying interpretations and practices. Before we can usefully begin to examine these ten original principles in detail it is helpful to go back to the source and try to see at what the original formulation was directed.

HH. Sanatan Dharma is the natural Law which encompasses everything Eternal, and it is given by the Absolute. Since it is natural, it is directly related to nature of mankind. That is why an individual, whatever their background, always knows in their heart what is good and what is bad. It is not necessary to teach this for everybody knows it already from within their own nature—and yet they don't do what they know is good. Each individual indulges in things which are pleasing and profitable and so does wrong and strays from the Truth, ignoring what they know to be right. This creates the misery in the world one sees in the poor, the sick and the deprived. It is the duty of those who know the Truth and can respond to its demands to help those who suffer. If you look at the cause of poverty, sickness or deprivation, you will see that ignorance is the root cause. Because people ignore the truth they know, they have to suffer for it. But though someone has fallen, he need not be censured and ignored, others must help him get on his feet again. Today many are fallen and this makes it

necessary they be allowed to rise through the teaching of Truth which is Sanatan Dharma. All religions are based on the prime concept of Truth, enshrined in all human beings, so people must unite to work for the cause of goodness.

The Western System formulates something very like this as its primary aim, the awakening of 'Conscience'—the individual's inner emotional realization of truth. Without this awakening all the other tenets of the System, self-remembering, non-identification, abandoning self-will etc. would not become a practical possibility.

Sanatan Dharma lays down ten principles considered a practical necessity before individual human beings can reliably remember and honour the essential truth which is their nature. Then, if they can live their lives with this awareness, the process of transformation will naturally begin—the transformation of the individual's nature to realise its oneness with the Creator. In a sense all work on ourselves consists of choosing the influences to which we wish to subject ourselves—and of actually acknowledging and acting on these influences—of which our own built-in Conscience is the first and most important.

Conscience is the light of the Soul that is burning within the chambers of your heart. It is the little spark of celestial fire which makes known to you the presence of the Indweller, the author of the Divine laws of Truth and Holiness.

It raises the voice of protest whenever anything is thought or done contrary to the interest of its Master. Conscience is the voice of the Self which says 'yes' or 'no' when you are involved in a moral struggle. It is a call from within to do and act, or avoid it. Conscience is the internal monitor. Conscience is truth in the form of emotion. Conscience is like a silent teacher. It is the inner voice without sound. It is very delicate and easily stifled. It is so very clear that it is impossible to mistake it. Cowardice asks, 'Is it safe?' Avarice asks, 'Is there any gain in it?' Vanity asks, 'Can I become famous?' Lust asks, 'Is there pleasure?' But Conscience asks, 'Is it right?' A glad clear conscience is the temple of God.

*translated from the Vedanta by Swami Shivananda.*

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