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Hindu Dharma: 1 – Bhagwan and Bhagwati

Bhupendra Ratanji Hajratwala, Ph.D. - Pleasanton, California, USA

In Hinduism, we have many gods and goddesses. Not all of them are called Bhagwan or Bhagwati. It includes only three gods. They are Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. Likewise, the female counterpart of Bhagwan, Bhagwati refers to only four goddesses. They are Saraswati, Lakshmi, Parvati, and Shree Devi. Shree Devi is a combination avatar deity of the first three goddesses mentioned earlier. In common usage, many mistakenly refer to other beings, saints, gurus, munis, etc. with Bhagwan or Bhagwan Shree. Such reference is only indicative of an honorary status.

Both Bhagwan and Bhagwati mean ‘He/She who has Bhag’. Bhag means the sum of following: Aishwarya, Dharma, Yash, Shree, Gyan, and Vairagya. Although, I have translated these six words, the English equivalents are woefully inadequate. Each word would need many examples to illustrate the true meaning. Sanskrit words have multiple meanings. For now, let me begin with these short definitions.

1. Aishwarya is unparalleled opulence and wealth.
2. Dharma here is the right thing to do.
3. Yash is fame. Here the reference is not just in this world but in all three lokas (realms of heaven, universe, and hell).
4. Shree is total and complete material wealth. Goddess Lakshmi is also referred to as Shree. Since Lakshmi is Vishnu’s consort, Bhagwan most commonly refers to Vishnu. Likewise, Bhagwati most commonly refers to Lakshmi.
5. Gyan is total and complete knowledge. The reference is about the knowledge of Brahm. Once one knows Brahm, one knows everything.
6. Vairagya is total and absolute detachment, total absence of Kama, desires or passions.

Whatever meaning we understand of these words, the actual is millions time more than that. Not all gods and goddesses have all six of these. The one who has all six knows about the beginning, past, present, and the future of the universe, and all its praanis (inhabitants) and their karmas, as well as about Vidya (total and complete knowledge of Brahm) and Avidya (All that does not yield that knowledge, meaning ignorance).

Finally, the expression ‘Hey (sometimes written as He) Bhagwan’ is common. In English, to address James as ‘Hey James’, would be considered insulting by him. In Sanskrit, Hey is a common word used before addressing an individual informally, thus Hey Rama, Hey Bhagwan, etc.

Hindu Dharma: 2 – Eesha

Bhupendra Ratanji Hajratwala, Ph.D. - Pleasanton, California, USA

Our gods are known by many names. In Vedas, the Supreme Brahman is called Eesha. Eesha means He who rules over Jagat (as explained in Eeshopanishad). Jagat means that which moves meaning this universe. Thus, Eesha is referred to both Vishnu and Shiva and generally Eeshaa (feminine) is referred to Durga (combination of all three Shaktis, Shreedevi). Over a period of time Eesha came to be commonly written as Isha and its use primarily fell to that of being a suffix. As a suffix it means the highest, greatest, or the best of. Here are some common examples of popular names and their meanings. (Short “a” at the end of Eesha is often dropped, and long “aa” is truncated to a in common spellings).

Alpesh - Vishnu, Lord of Alpa (the smallest).

Bhupesh - Indra, Lord of Bhupa (kings).

Deenesh - Vishnu, Lord of Deena (poor people).

Dhaneesha - Lakshmi, The Goddess of Dhana (wealth).

Dhanesh - Vishnu, the Lord of Dhana (wealth)

Dinesh - Surya, The Lord of Din (day).

Elesh - Shiva, Lord of Eelaa (Parvati).

Ganesh - Ganapati, Lord of Gana (Shiva's soldiers)

Himesh - Shiva, Lord of Him (cold, ice).

Humesh - Vishnu, Lord of the Huma (smallest particle).

Jagadish - Vishnu, Lord of Jagat (universe). Also used for Shiva.

Kalpesh - Vishnu, Lord of Kalpa (time, sacred law). Also used for Shiva.

Kamalesh - Brahma, Lord of Kamal (lotus)

Lokesh - Shiva, Lord of Loka (realms, meaning earth, 7 heavens, and 7 hells).

Mahesh - Shiva, The great (Maha) God.

Manisha - Saraswati, Goddess of Mann (intelligence, desires).

Naresh - King, Lord of people (Nara).

Nayanesh - Vishnu, Lord of Nayana (eyes).

Ramesh - Vishnu, Lord of the Rama (play or 'lila').

Satyesh - Vishnu, Lord of Satya (truth)

Umesh - Shiva, Lord of Uma (Parvati).

Vijayesh - Shiva, Lord of Vijay (victory)

Yogesh - Shiva, Lord of Yoga.

Hindu Dharma: 3 – Four Canons

Bhupendra Ratanji Hajratwala, Ph.D. - Pleasanton, California, USA

Canons (known as Stambhs) are the pillars or corner stones of Hinduism foundation. The four canons are: Dharma, Artha, Kama, and Moksha. These are not just meant for theological discussion by the swamijis and shashtrijis but they are meant for all of us to use in everyday life. Throughout the scriptures, these four canons are aptly but often subtly described, illustrated, and discussed. The three most famous of these are mentioned here.

The first one is the four corners of havan kund or yagna fire pit. It is never round and is square, all sides being equal with four corners. This is indicative of the equal importance of all four canons in everyday life.

The second example is that of four rounds that a couple makes around the sacred fire during wedding ceremony (chaar fera). This is one of the most symbolic of Hindu samskara ceremony. In each of the first three rounds when a groom leads, it is symbolic of his promise that he will be the principal provider and leader for himself and his family (wife and children) in fulfilling dharma (the right thing to do), artha (the purpose of life and providing material comforts), and kama (the worldly pleasures and procreational sex). Even more important is the final round where the bride leads. This is symbolic of her promise that she will be responsible and take the lead if he sways away from fulfilling the first three duties and lead her family to the path of moksha.

The final example is that of a common picture one sees in almost every Hindu home. It is that of Lord Krishna guiding Arjuna in a chariot pulled by four horses at the battlefield of Kurukshetra. The battlefield of Kurukshetra is symbolic of our body and the fight is symbolic of the internal fight within us in trying to decide between good karma and bad karma. Arjuna is symbolic of our own Atman. The four horses are symbolic of the four canons. Only by allowing the Lord (symbolized by Krishna) to lead our atman along the path of dharma, artha, and kama, can we get the fourth horse (moksha) to move. Only when all four horses move, the chariot (life) will move forward. Failing to do so, results in the chariot either not moving, or going off the main path (purpose of life), or getting killed by the Kauravas (the evil tendencies within all of us).

Hindu Dharma: 4 – Laws of Karma

Bhupendra Ratanji Hajratwala, Ph.D. - Pleasanton, California, USA

Hinduism does not have a single source where the laws of Karma are written. They are dispersed over many texts and often stated subtly and cryptically in epic stories. Following are generally accepted laws of karma.

1. No one is exempt from the laws of karma, including the creator himself. Thus all Gods and divine beings too are subject to the laws of karma.
2. There are only two types of karma: good and bad.
3. Good karmas yield good results and bad karmas yield bad results.
4. Karmas are not additive. Thus five good karmas and three bad karmas do not equal two good karmas. One enjoys the rewards of five good karmas and suffers the consequences of three bad karmas.
5. Not doing any karma is also karma and may be good or bad depending on the circumstances.
6. In order to do karma, one needs at least one sense (out of possible five senses). Thus, atman alone (after death) accrues no karmas.
7. The balance sheet of karmas is carried over from lifetime to lifetime.
8. Our karmas are our karmas alone. We cannot enjoy the benefits of others' good karmas nor suffer consequences of others' bad karmas. Even though it appears at times that we suffer (or enjoy) due to actions of others that suffering (or enjoyment) is due to leftover results of our previous karmas either in this life or a previous life.
9. Karmas cannot be done on behalf of someone. It is like exercise. We cannot pay someone to exercise for us, so that we will get stronger or fitter. We have to do it our self. All karmas are the same way. The same is true for all religious ceremonies and rites. We cannot pay a priest to do 40,000 japas or any puja and get the benefit. If we pay the money to get the japas done, we get the benefit of the good karma of donation (if it is a donation) but not that of actually doing the japas. Hindu scriptures are full of stories where asuras (evil beings) enjoy the benefits of doing intense austerities (tapa) but finally suffer due to their evil karmas.

Dr. Hajratwala is a retired professor of pharmacy. He writes regularly about Hinduism in various media. As a section editor for religion segment of Samaj Sandesh, he is presenting a series of articles describing Hindu Dharma, Hinduism beginning with this issue. We hope they will prove useful to our readers, especially youngsters in understanding important aspects of the Hindu Dharma. We welcome our reader's comments, questions, and contributions related to Hindu Dharma in general or as is practiced in our community and should be sent to him at hajratwala@yahoo.com.

Hindu Dharma: 5 – Artha - Tann

Bhupendra Ratanji Hajratwala, Ph.D. - Pleasanton, California, USA

Email: Hajratwala@yahoo.com; Phone; (925) 846-3521

The three important aspects of Artha (second canon) for us are to look after our Tann (physical body), Mann (mind), and Dhan (wealth). Hindu scriptures remind us to serve the Lord with these three - since we get these due to the grace of our Lord. Before we can serve anyone, especially the Lord, we must have all three of these in good shape. Good shape is defined by their **nature** (suddha/asuddha) **and strength**. Suddha means free from pollutants.

Nature: The incarnation concept teaches us that our physical body is a temporary abode of our Atman. Just as a tenant is supposed to keep a rental property in a good shape, so should we keep our tann in good shape - only then will we be able to serve or offer it to the Lord. Just as we would not like to be served by a waiter who is sick and dressed in dirty clothes, smoking, drinking etc, the Lord does not want to be served by us when our tann is asuddha and weak. Tann also includes its physical surroundings. When tann is in physically clean surroundings, it also feels clean. When tann is in a messy surrounding, it is also not looked after well.

To keep the tann physically clean: Shower, get ready, groom and dress well; wear good and clean clothes, keep the immediate surroundings such as our own room or home neat, tidy, and well organized; and keep tann free from pollutants.

Asuddha tann attracts others to dump pollutants in us. This is similar to how people are careful not to even throw a scrap of paper in a clean place. They will look for a waste basket. When people see that the place is littered, they too will throw things thinking that is normal. Asuddha tann also attracts physical abuse or abuse by offer of other pollutants.

Our tann becomes asuddha with a variety of pollutants.

Common pollutants are common in society at large and often mimic as being normal part of daily living. Others may not be aware of our asuddha nature. Once identified, these are relatively easy to remove. Examples: junk food, sugary soft drinks, etc.

Serious pollutants are beginning to become habits and hence appear normal to us. Others may recognize them but may not be willing to help us get rid of them. Once identified, these will take some serious effort to get rid of. Examples: cigarettes, social drinks, etc.

Dangerous pollutants have already become a habit and are now beginning to wield their destructive powers. They are causing harm to us and others around us. Others are able to recognize them and often are willing to help. These require serious intervention from outside and professional help. Examples: illegal drugs, inhalants, etc.

Strength: Tann should also be kept strong. Strong does not mean like a body builder or an athlete. Strong tann refers to being physically fit. Our shastras stress the importance of doing asanas in yoga to achieve this. With the advances in internet, there is plenty of information available about keeping ourselves physically fit. Good diet, routine exercise, regular physical check-ups and living in a healthy and happy surroundings are key elements to fulfill our artha.

Tann is always listed first because suddha and strong tann is necessary to keep our mann (in next article) suddha and strong - the second aspect of fulfilling our artha.

Hindu Dharma: 6 – Artha - Mann

Bhupendra Ratanji Hajratwala, Ph.D. - Pleasanton, California, USA

Email: hajratwala@yahoo.com; Phone; (925) 846-3521

The three important aspects of Artha (second canon) for us are to look after our Tann (physical body), Mann (mind), and Dhan (wealth). Hindu scriptures remind us to serve the Lord with these three - since we get these due to the grace of our Lord. Last month we looked at how to keep our Tann suddha and strong. In this issue, we will look at how to keep our mann suddha and strong.

Mann: To do any karma, we need at least one sense. All five of our senses are controlled by mann. Just like tann, mann also gets polluted. When our mann is asuddha and weak, it is unable to control senses and thus we behave irresponsibly and make errors in judgments in the course of daily living. Mann also includes its physical surroundings. Our physical surroundings for mann includes all the people we come in daily contact with such as our family members, friends, people we work with, etc. Our mann becomes asuddha with a variety of pollutants.

Common pollutants are gossips, negative thinking about self and others, etc. These are common in society at large and often mimic as being normal part of daily living. Others may not be aware of our asuddha nature. Once identified, these are relatively easy to remove. .

Serious pollutants are continuous exposure to violence, sex, bad language, etc. When they begin to become habits they appear normal to us. Others may recognize them but may not be willing to help us get rid of them. Once identified, these will take some serious effort to get rid of.

Dangerous pollutants are hate, anger, anger filled talk, etc. When they have already become a habit, they begin to wield their destructive powers. They are causing harm to us and others around us. Others are able to recognize them and often are willing to help. These require professional help and serious intervention from outside.

To keep mann suddha, it is important to keep our immediate surroundings suddha and strong. Asuddha mann attracts others to dump pollutants in us. That means keep company of people who have positive thinking and who are free from pollutants. As much as possible stay away from people who say negative things and have bad habits.

Strength: Mann should also be kept strong. It is the inherent nature of mann to dislike making any decisions. Our mann falsely rationalizes 1. not having to make a decision and 2. when things go wrong, it was not its fault - both as advantages. We have learned previously (Article 4) that we alone are responsible for our karmas so the first thing to teach our mann is to learn to accept responsibility for our actions. Whatever karma we do, we are responsible for it.

As we have seen earlier, well controlled senses are indicative of strong mind. We must teach ourselves to control all our senses - with emphasis on **all**.

In the next article, we will look at the third aspect of Artha - namely Dhan (wealth in broad sense - not just money).

Hindu Dharma: 7 – Artha - Dhan

Bhupendra Ratanji Hajratwala, Ph.D. - Pleasanton, California, USA

Email: hajratwala@yahoo.com; Phone; (925) 846-3521

The three important aspects of Artha (second canon) for us are to look after our Tann (physical body), Mann (mind), and Dhan (wealth). Hindu scriptures remind us to serve the Lord with these three - since we get these due to the grace of our Lord. Previously we looked at how to keep our Tann and Mann suddha and strong. In this issue, we will look at how to keep our Dhan suddha and strong.

Dhan: Dhan is wealth in a very broad sense. The Goddess of Dhan is Lakshmi. Our scriptures recognize 16,108 forms (roop) of Lakshmi. Thus, besides money Dhan includes all material things such as clothing, jewelry, etc. Even time is considered Dhan. Thus Dhan is something that can be collected or gathered and spent or exchanged for other forms of Dhan. Dhan is also a form of energy (Shakti); however this form of Shakti is not able to overcome obstacles in life by itself. This is quite well illustrated by Sita (avatar of Goddess Lakshmi) being abducted by evil Ravan. We see examples of these in everyday life in society as well.

Just like our Mann and Tann, Dhan also becomes asuddha with a variety of pollutants. When any form of Dhan is acquired by means of these pollutants, that form of Dhan is asuddha.

Common pollutants are lying and cheating. Others may not be aware of our asuddha nature. Once identified, these are relatively easy to remove.

Serious pollutants are routine wastage of Dhan. For example if Dhan is time then wasting time by routinely playing internet games is polluting that form of Dhan. Others may recognize them but may not be willing to help us get rid of them. Once identified, these will take some serious effort to get rid of.

Dangerous pollutants are completely ignoring the opportunities to accumulate Dhan. Thus skipping school or work to go see a movie or play games is ignoring the availability to advance. When these pollutants become a habit, they begin to wield their destructive powers. They are causing harm to us and others around us. Others are able to recognize them and often are willing to help. These require professional help and serious intervention from outside.

To keep Dhan suddha, it is important to keep our immediate surroundings suddha and strong. Asuddha Dhan attracts others to dump pollutants in us. That means keep company of people who have acquired Dhan without the help of these pollutants. As much as possible stay away from people who have polluted Dhan - regardless of how much.

Strength: Dhan should also be kept strong. Strength of Dhan is measured by how well it is managed and understood. Only strong and suddha Dhan becomes beneficial not only to us but also

to others. Most people believe that if they have more money their problems will be solved. In general, money problems are never solved by money. We see examples of this in individuals, society, as well as in governments.

In the next article, we will look at the third canon of Hinduism - Kama.

Hindu Dharma: 8 – Kama

Bhupendra Ratanji Hajratwala, Ph.D. - Pleasanton, California, USA

Email: hajratwala@yahoo.com; Phone; (925) 846-3521

Kama is one of the major canons of Hinduism. In Western literature, Kama is generally translated as sexual desire - mainly due to the Kama Sutra literature. Kama is desire in general. Hinduism is the only major religion that recognizes the importance of Kama in daily life and hence is given a position of third major canon.

Kama is important for daily living. It is a driving force that makes us do things. Without Kama, we would sit idle and not be able to achieve anything. Desires of all types are Kama and thus sexual desires are a part of Kama. Kama is present in all beings males as well as females.

Kama is such a strong force that control over it has been cited as a desirable goal in all scriptures and aspired to by great rishis and even gods. Basic understanding of Dharma and Artha is necessary before trying to control Kama. If the Kama is not fulfilled its first result is Krodha that is anger. In everyday life we see examples of this. When Krodha is present, we cannot fulfill either our Dharma or Artha. Thus unfulfilled Kama will prevent us from proceeding on the path towards Moksha - the ultimate goal.

To control Kama - it is necessary to understand its two major components, Wants and Needs. What we want is not necessarily what we need. For example, if we are hungry, we need food. We may want a fancy food in an expensive restaurant - but that is not what we need. When we cannot differentiate between the wants and needs we tend to make irrational decisions often harmful to us or others and often ignore the needs of those around us. Our failure to control Kama by failing to recognize it is destructive. This destructive force is often very quick and difficult to overcome. We will learn to control Kama by observing others - not to gossip about them or to teach them, but by learning from them.

Often people mistake suppressing Kama for controlling Kama. When Kama is suppressed it gives a momentary illusion of being under control. Then without notice, it releases its destructive force and not only harms those who suppress it but often those around them. There are many examples of Kama suppressed - that is denial of its existence without explanation or consequences. Our Mann is unable to comprehend this and tries to circumvent the prohibition.

Controlling Kama is far more effective than suppressing it. Generally this involves rational explanation for the need to control and consequences of not controlling. A strong and suddha Mann (in article # 6) is very important in doing this. A weak and asuddha Mann cannot control Kama. We will use a simple example of Kama - Eating sweets. Well controlled Kama will lead a person to enjoy these in the course of daily living by enjoying sweets in moderation and occasionally. Uncontrolled Kama will lead a person to eat more than necessary and result in unnecessary weight

gain and related health problems. We can learn much by observing examples of other such Kamas in us, around us, and in the society at large.

In the next article, we will look at Kama in religion.

Hindu Dharma: 9 – Kama in Religion

Bhupendra Ratanji Hajratwala, Ph.D. - Pleasanton, California, USA

Email: hajratwala@yahoo.com; Phone; (925) 846-3521

Kama is not only one of the major canons of Hinduism but also is one of the major five obstacles on the path of dharma. This obstacle is so difficult to overcome that even gods succumb to it. So that we can better understand this, just as animate objects have been personified, the inanimate items such as love, anger, thirst, hunger etc. have all been personified. The personification of Kama is Kamadev, the god of desires. His corresponding Shakti (energy) is Rati, the goddess of passion. Thus without passion the desires remain unfulfilled.

Of the numerous stories in our scriptures that vividly illustrate the role of Kama, I have selected just a few and narrated them briefly.

The demon king of Lanka, Ravana was so overcome with Kama for the Ayodhya Princess, Sita that he kidnapped her from the forest dwelling. Despite pleas from all his well wishers, his Kama was so strong that he could not overcome it and it led him away from the path of Dharma. This eventually caused not only his own destruction but also that of everyone else who had supported him. This story is one of the major lessons of the epic scripture known as Ramayana, the story of Rama.

However, it should not be interpreted that Kama would so adversely affect only the evil beings like Ravana. Even pious beings are subject to Kama's destructive force. This is well illustrated numerous times in another epic scripture known as Mahabharata, the story of great king Bharata and his descendants. A very pious king Santanu (father of Bhishma) is overcome with Kama for Satyawati, a poor fisherwoman maiden about whom he knew very little. Bhishma tries to be an ideal son by taking his great vow of celibacy so that his father can fulfill his Kama. Once again Kama was too strong and leads Santanu away from the path of Dharma. Instead of rejecting his son's misguided help, Santanu blesses Bhishma with the boon of 'death at will' and marries Satyawati. What seems like a great boon at the time, turns out to be a great curse not only for Bhishma but also for the rest of Santanu clan.

Once again, it should not be interpreted that Kama is only an affliction of men. Women are equally subject to Kama. This story is also from the epic scripture Ramayana. Lord Brahma's beautiful daughter Ahalya was married to the pious but much older Rishi Gautama. Ahalya was so overcome with Kama for Lord Indra (King of Gods) that she strays away from the path of Dharma and is discovered by Gautama in an embarrassing position with Indra. The consequences are dire for both Ahalya and Indra. Gautama's curse turns Ahalya into a stone. Years later she is released from her curse when Lord Rama touches the stone with his foot.

The last example is from the epic Shiva Purana. At the urging of other gods, Kamadev unsuccessfully tries to excite Lord Shiva for union with Parvati. Shiva opens his third eye in anger and burns Kamadev to ashes. However, without Kama all beings cease to function and so after hearing pleas from all the gods and especially from Rati, He revives Kamadev to his former self.

In the next article, we will look at the major techniques used in scriptures to control Kama in overcoming as an obstacle.

Hindu Dharma: 10 – Kama as obstacle

Bhupendra Ratanji Hajratwala, Ph.D. - Pleasanton, California, USA

Email: hajratwala@yahoo.com; Phone; (925) 846-3521

Kama is not only one of the major canons of Hinduism but also is one of the major five obstacles on the path to Moksha. As we saw in the last article, this obstacle is so difficult to overcome that even gods succumb to it. Fortunately for us mortals, our scriptures show us ways to overcome Kama.

Our scriptures show **four major techniques**. These techniques are not only used but also effective in controlling other four major obstacles namely Krodha, Lobha, Moha, and Maya. All techniques are very simple yet difficult to put in practice especially in the beginning. They get easier with time and practice.

The **first** major technique used is **to identify** the existence of Kama within us. Simple as it sounds, it is perhaps quite difficult as our Ahankar (ego) tries to block the identification. Kama is not just sexual desires but any desire. Sexual desires are just one aspect of Kama which Western translators like to emphasize. To identify any Kama within us, we have to learn to identify and differentiate between needs and wants. Both are Kama. However needs are one of the founding canon whereas want is an obstacle. As an example, transportation for going to work and back. Some transportation is necessary to fulfill our artha, so an affordable bicycle, a small car, or even a monthly train ticket would suffice. However if we want a luxury car that we cannot afford then such Kama acts as an obstacle. We have to identify each occurrence. Is it what we **need** or is it what we **want**?

The **second** major technique used is **to avoid**. It is better to not get in the situation rather than trying to solve it. This is simpler than it sounds but often impossible to do. Still we should try. As an example, if we are diabetic and we know that we should avoid or limit the intake of sugar then it is better to avoid going to places where sweets, cakes, and desserts are served. However this may not always be possible such as when attending a party, wedding, or other festivities. That is when the next two techniques help.

The **third** major technique used is **to say the Lords name three times**. This is the technique typified by Sage Narada. He is known to wander the universe uttering ‘Narayan, Narayan, Narayan’ regardless of the situation he encounters. This technique is equated to being equal to quickly pouring water to douse fire. To be effective, say it nice and slow in a rhythmic pattern. You can say any other deity’s name however very few other deity names are uttered for this. No goddesses names are used for this purpose.

The **fourth** major technique used is **to control our senses**. Perhaps the hardest of all and requires much practice and patience. Notice that the technique uses control and suppression. If senses are suppressed then they will go totally out of control and often at the most inopportune times.

We also need to remember that it takes great Rishis years to master these four techniques. If we can use any one even a few times, we would achieve a lot. We can all try to use technique one and three as often as we can.

In the next article, we will look at the last major canon of Hinduism - Moksha.

Hindu Dharma: 11 – Moksha

Bhupendra Ratanji Hajratwala, Ph.D. - Pleasanton, California, USA

Email: hajratwala@yahoo.com; Phone; (925) 846-3521

Moksha is one of the major canon of Hinduism and the ultimate goal of all Hindus. Moksha means salvation. Atman takes on incarnations again and again based on its karma. These incarnations are finite and they end in Moksha.

It is important to understand the role of women in achieving moksha in a society. This important role is granted to a woman when she completes the fourth and final circle around the fire during the wedding ceremony. By the first three rounds the man promises to fulfill his responsibilities regarding Dharma, Artha, and Kama for the family. As we have seen in previous articles, it is very important to fulfill these three on the path leading to Moksha. In the final round the woman promises to guide and correct not only her husband but the family to the path leading to Moksha.

Besides fulfilling the necessary Dharma, Artha, and Kama in daily life, two very important aspects are important in order to just proceed to the path of Moksha. These are Bhavna and Shraddha.

Bhavna comes from the Sanskrit word Bhav meaning inclination of mind. Bhavna is that inclination of mind in terms of love and respect of untold proportion towards a chosen deity. Simple as it sounds, developing bhavna towards what is visible to us as an inanimate doll like image of the Lord is not easy. Bhakti movement which began around 14th century was largely responsible for popularizing methods to develop bhavna. Bhajans are sung as one of the most popular means to increase bhavna towards ones chosen deity. In a sort of a feeble attempt, most discourses on scriptures begin with a bhajan so that even a slight hint of bhavna can develop which would of course help in listening and understanding.

However, travelling on any path leading to moksha is not possible without **shraddha**. Shraddha is not possible without bhavna. Shraddha is total and absolute faith. Shraddha is different from trust (vishwas).

As an example, when we ride as a passenger in a car driven by someone we have trust in that driver that he will take us safely to our destination. However, we are still aware of the possibility that he may get lost, get in accident, etc. Our trust gets weaker as we learn about his previous driving problems, traffic tickets, or current erratic driving. Thus we have trust in the driver but not shraddha. A young child who is riding with his parent has shraddha and not just trust in his parent's ability to take him to his destination. The possibility of his parent getting lost or getting in an accident does not even occur to him. It is this shraddha that allows him to fall asleep in a fast moving car.

In the next article, we will discuss how to develop shraddha.

Hindu Dharma: 12 – To develop Shraddha

Bhupendra Ratanji Hajratwala, Ph.D. - Pleasanton, California, USA

Email: hajratwala@yahoo.com; Phone; (925) 846-3521

In the last article, we saw the necessity of bhavna and shraddha during our journey on the path of Moksha. Bhakti movement made singing of bhajans popular as one of the means of developing bhavna. However, developing shraddha is equally important.

Since shraddha is not possible without bhavna, if we develop a little bit of bhavna, then developing shraddha towards the Lord will be a little ‘easier.’ For adults, developing shraddha is harder than it appears. This is partly because as we grow older, our ability to develop shraddha is tainted by our own experiences especially unpleasant ones in life. Even then, it is possible to have shraddha.

Let us recall an example of a child in a car ride. A young child who is riding with his parent has shraddha and not just trust (vishwas) in his parent’s ability to take him to his destination. The possibility of his parent getting lost or getting in an accident does not even occur to him. It is this shraddha that allows him to fall asleep in a fast moving car.

To develop shraddha, try to imagine yourself as that little child riding with his parent. The parent in this case is our Lord. Where He takes us, how He takes us, when will we reach there, all these questions and their answers should be left to Him. When we reach there, He will tell us and when we are hungry, He will feed us.

Developing shraddha does not mean that we need not do any karma, since He is going to take care of everything. By now we have learned that karmas must be done. Our artha of this life is to do our dharma which can only be fulfilled by doing karma. But like a child, our principal dharma is to be happy and to please our parents. As you can see, the Lord has not given us a difficult task. It is we who have made this travel (*journey of life*) a difficult one by throwing tantrums, fiddling with all the knobs and buttons in the car, making unnecessary noise, trying to open windows and doors while the car is moving, etc.

For every Karma that we do or is to be done, let us try to do them with shraddha. The path to moksha, no matter which one is chosen, will give us a great ride. Sit back, relax, enjoy the scenery, smile and thank the Parent who is driving, eat what is given without fussing, and accept what He gives with gratefulness. How much simpler can it (*life*) get?

Lord Krishna tells Pandav Prince Arjuna about three major paths to achieve moksha namely, Gyan Marg (path of knowledge), Karma Marg (path of action) and Bhakti Marg (path of devotion). We will explain each of these paths in the next few articles.

Hindu Dharma: 13 – Gyan Marg

Bhupendra Ratanji Hajratwala, Ph.D. - Pleasanton, California, USA

Email: hajratwala@yahoo.com; Phone; (925) 846-3521

Lord Krishna tells Pandav Prince Arjuna about three major paths to achieve moksha namely, Gyan Marg (path of knowledge), Karma Marg (path of action) and Bhakti Marg (path of devotion). We will briefly talk about Gyan Marg. Shreemad Bhagwad Geeta devotes full two chapters (4 and 7) to Gyan Marg.

The Gyan (knowledge) that our scriptures refer to is not about the degrees earned at the universities. It refers to the theological knowledge. The knowledge about the Lord, Dharma, Karma, Cycles of births and deaths, about achieving Moksha, etc. is considered theological knowledge. Thus an extremely well educated person can be totally ignorant.

The theological knowledge is not something that can be acquired by simply reading this article or a book. As we have seen previously, it begins with Bhavna. Then the entire learning process must begin with shraddha. We as new students begin to learn initially by listening and later by reading, we would come across many words that make no sense to us. It would be just as if we are listening to a speech in Chinese or French. Occasionally, we may come across a word or so that we may think we understand (such as Gyan) but its meaning is totally different. It takes time and patience to learn. Repeated exposure to such discussions, readings, and listening is an absolute must in order to understand. Krishna tells Arjuna that Gyan Marg is supreme but difficult.

One of the simple examples of Gyan Marg lesson is a picture of Lord Krishna in Arjun's Chariot driven by four horses. Countless Hindu homes have this picture often with a very famous sloka 7 "Yada Yada Hi Dharmashya ..." from Geeta's Gyan Marg Chapter 4. Arjun in the picture is Atman. Chariot is our daily life. The four horses are the four canons of Hinduism (Dharma, Artha, Kama, and Moksha), which we have been discussing in this series of articles. Sometimes the picture depicts five horses; in that case it refers to five senses. We need to learn that we should give the reins of our life to Krishna. Of course, wise as we are, we decide to take charge of these horses from Krishna's hand with disastrous results only to blame Krishna for not looking after us and our chariot.

Unfortunately there is no single book that can be said to be an easy introductory Gyan Marg book. Much loved and venerated Geeta is indeed very difficult to read and even more so to understand. For most of us mortals, the lessons of Gyan Marg (like learning times tables in elementary school) is slow and often tedious. With time, patience, and perseverance it yields the most wonderful results. You as a reader have taken the very first necessary step to Gyan Marg by reading this article.

In the next article, we will discuss Karma Marg, path of action.

Hindu Dharma: 14 – Karma Marg

Bhupendra Ratanji Hajratwala, Ph.D. - Pleasanton, California, USA

Email: hajratwala@yahoo.com; Phone; (925) 846-3521

In the last article, we talked about Gyan Marg. In this article we will discuss Karma Marg. In Shreemad Bhagwad Geeta, Lord Krishna devotes Chapters 3 and 5 to explain the Karma concept to Arjuna. Let us take a simple analogy to first understand the concept of Marg. So far we have learned that our goal is to achieve Moksha. In terms of something we can relate, let us say our goal is to go to Disney Park. We can say there are three major ways to go to Disney.

First. To reach Disney, it would be great to know a little bit more about where we are going. Is it the Disney Park in California, or Florida, or France? How will we get there? How much will it cost? Where will we stay? How many days do we need? All this is knowledge. Knowing all this (Gyan Marg) helps us achieve our goal (Moksha) of reaching Disney park. However, we can see that gathering all the information is time consuming. We talked about this Gyan Marg in the last article.

Second. We can physically do something (Karma) to reach Disney Park. We pack our suitcases, hop in the car, and start driving to Disney Park. Whatever we are doing to reach Disney Park is our Karma. However, as we will soon learn that even if we drove for weeks, chances are that we will not reach Disney Park unless we know where to go. We need GPS, map or guidance. Thus, karma by themselves does not lead to moksha. However, karma together with Gyan is necessary to achieve moksha. Even Arjuna gets confused about Gyan Marg and Karma Marg. In the first two Slokas of Chapter 3 (of Geeta) he asks Krishna to explain the difference between the two Margs again.

Krishna explains again and again to Arjuna not to abandon Karma Marg. We must do our Karma. However, all karmas must be done without expectations and they must all be offered to the Lord. That is perhaps one of the simplest of all Krishna's command ('Karmenye Vadhika' Ch. 2: 47) to us but is also one of the hardest to follow. As we hear in many discourses, following this command alone will lead us to Moksha. Since no single analogy is adequate in explaining these complex concepts, let us take refuge in another analogy. Let us say we are studying to pass the Driver's test. We should do our karma (learning the rules of driving) without expectation (to get the Driver's License). If our goal becomes that of receiving the Driver's License, then we will cheat etc., instead of doing our karma. On the other hand, having done our karma without expectation, (that is offered to the Lord) there should be no doubt (shraddha) that we would receive our Driver's License. The Lord is always there to guide our chariot. All we have to do is let him guide the horses of our chariot, listen to his advise, be happy, and enjoy the ride.

In the next article we will talk about the third path - Bhakti Marg.

Hindu Dharma: 15 – Bhakti Marg

Bhupendra Ratanji Hajratwala, Ph.D. - Pleasanton, California, USA

Email: hajratwala@yahoo.com; Phone; (925) 846-3521

So far we have talked about Gyan Marg and Karma Marg. In this article we will talk about Bhakti Marg. We will continue to use our analogy of going to Disney Park. Thus, our goal is to reach there. So far we have talked about (Gyan Marg) using GPS, maps, etc. to learn about Disney Park and about driving (Karma Marg) to get there. There is still a third and a popular way to get there.

Bhakti Marg is a path of devotion. This path was popularized around 14th century during the Mogul rein in India. One of its more visible aspect is that of singing bhajan or dhun in the praise of the Lord. Moksha is not only possible but attainable as amply exemplified by saints such as Meerabai and Narsinh Mehta.

Let us continue to use the analogy of trying to reach Disney Park (achieving Moksha) as our goal. Previously we saw that to use Maps or gather information is one way (Gyan Marg) or to drive or fly to is another (Karma Marg). However, all of us are like little children. We don't know much about Gyan Marg and we are unable to follow Karma Marg. What children do is they post the Disney characters posters in their room, sing their songs, etc. We can see that they really want to go (devotion) to Disney Park. Eventually parents or some one in the family who is going there will take them there. That is Bhakti Marg. We sing bhajans, dhuns, and aaratis. We celebrate festivals such as Janmastami and Diwali.

Because this movement began relatively recently, all the bhajans, dhuns, and aaratis are written in regional languages such as Gujarati, Punjabi, Tamil, etc. There are none in Sanskrit. Vedas are written by men and are considered to be written at the divine commands. Bhajans, dhuns, and aaratis are simply considered written by men. Often the name of the writer is incorporated in the last line such as 'Bhane Shivananda Swami ...'. All three are meant to be sung either by themselves or can be led by one person and followed by others. Bhajans and dhuns are meant to be sung independently of puja rituals. Aaratis are meant to be sung at the end of a puja ritual. All are meant to please the particular deity by singing His/Her praise and special divine qualities they possess.

Back to the example of trying to reach Disney Park. For those of us who don't want to bother with finding out all the information or driving, there are many companies and groups that offer tours. They take care of all the details from entry fees to accommodations to meals and everything in between. Same way we have many religious groups (panths) and seers (swamijis) of variety of titles that are willing to lead us on the path to Moksha. Just as the tour operators, these groups and swamijis can also be really good and some really crooked.

In the next article we will explain what to look out for as we travel down the Bhatki path.

Hindu Dharma: 16 – Swamis and Sants

Bhupendra Ratanji Hajratwala, Ph.D. - Pleasanton, California, USA

Email: hajratwala@yahoo.com; Phone; (925) 846-3521

We have learned that there are many who claim to be Swamis (Seers) and Sants (holy persons) and claim to lead us to the Moksha path. Like tour operators, these Swamis and Sants can also be really good and some really crooked. What shall we look for and how to choose the right one that will lead us to the Moksha? It may be difficult to find the right one, but being able to weed out the ‘fake’ ones would be a big help.

First let us differentiate between the Swamis and Sants. Because these titles are often self-conferred, they are incorrectly used. Swami is a person who has control over him self (Swam). Self in this case refers to one’s mind and hence control over all the senses. Swami can be a living or dead person. They can be men or women however majority of them are men. There are many religious groups (panths) that confer titles of Swami on their disciples. So, in a way, it has become a little bit like a degree. There are too many cases where these Swamis have succumbed to Kama, Krodha, Lobha, and Moha. They have not been able to overcome these primary obstacles of Moksha. So when an honored Swamiji gets angry (Krodha) at the organizers for not having a microphone working correctly, you can tell that this is a fake Swami. When a Swamiji is offered a salad to eat and he specifies that he can only eat with a certain type of dressing (such as Ranch), you can tell he has no control over his sense (of taste) and is a fake Swami. Swamis do not let their followers worship them or do their Aarati. They are supposed to show you how to worship the Lord and lead you to Moksha. These fake Swamis cannot lead you to Moksha. It should not cost you anything to see (Darshan) Swamis. If it does, you know that Swami is a fake and all he can do is lighten your pocket book.

Unlike Swamis, Sants cannot be living persons. Sants are those persons who are close to the divine and their life is filled with miracles that other living beings cannot perform or explain. Although there are many miracles in Sants’ life, Sants never perform miracles or claim to perform miracles either for individuals or public. Thus, a person performing public miracles such as presenting an audience member with a Shiva Linga from his mouth is not a Sant. Besides he is a living being. The reason living beings are not called Sants is because they must live the entire life in an exemplary fashion. Since we do not know if and when anyone can fail the test of either the control over senses or overcoming Moksha obstacles while they are alive, it is too early to declare them as Sants. Like Swamis, they too can be men (such as Sant Narsinha Mehta) or women (such as Sant Meera Bai). Sants cannot lead us to the path of Moksha. Remember they have died. The best the followers can do is emulate their life and hope to walk on the Moksha path without wavering. In the next article we will explain various Hindu religious sects (divisions) as we travel down the Bhakti path.

Hindu Dharma: 17 – Sects

Bhupendra Ratanji Hajratwala, Ph.D. - Pleasanton, California, USA

Email: hajratwala@yahoo.com; Phone; (925) 846-3521

In this article we will talk about our travel down the Bhakti Marg. Just as we have many who claim to be Swamis and Sants who are willing to lead us on the path to Moksha, there are religious sects (panths) that are also willing to lead us to the path of Moksha. If we once again resort to the example of our travel to Disneyland, we can compare the individuals as the tour operators and sects as the travel companies. These sects too can also be really good and some really crooked. What shall we look for and how to choose the right sect that will lead us to Moksha? It may be difficult to find the right one, but being able to weed out the ‘fake’ ones would be a big help.

There are numerous Hindu sects. We can divide them according to the principal path they choose to recommend Moksha.

The Gyan Marg sects usually has a word ‘Satsang’ or similar in their name. The ones to avoid are those that have rules that forbid you to discuss or listen to other than their own point of view. They usually proclaim that their interpretation of Shastra (scripture) is the correct one and to either listen to or discuss others’ point of view would contaminate your view. They will not lead you to Moksha.

The Karma Marg sects usually has a word ‘Seva’ or similar in their name. The ones to avoid are those that are involved in violence against or fight with some individuals or groups. They will usually try to justify these acts of aggression by incorrectly quoting some scripture, often times Geeta. These groups often have political associations. They will not lead you to Moksha.

The Bhakti Marg sects are the most common ones and can be further subdivided according to either the deity they worship or an individual they follow. Amongst the ones that worship a particular deity, to avoid are those that claim that their deity can only be ‘served’ by their pujari, or can only be worshiped in a certain way, or that their deity needs to be shielded so that other deities may not even cast their shadow on them. Amongst the ones that follow a particular individual (man or woman), to avoid are those that claim their chosen leader is not only divine but an incarnation of the Lord, those that claim that women must be subservient to men or their husbands, those that claim that women are the principal cause of Kama and distract their ‘holy’ leaders or followers and therefore must be segregated during worship, and those that claim that donating a certain amount of money or doing certain things will ensure that their ‘leader’ will personally escort them to heaven. Avoid all these sectarian groups.

Regardless of their Marg, any sect that justifies or advocates dying for the cause or the sect as achieving Moksha is to be avoided. They will lead us to death but not Moksha.

Finally, the scriptures do tell us that if one has a Darshan of the divine being and if we get touched by them in any way, we would achieve Moksha.

In the next article we will discuss how we can have Lord Vishnu's Darshan in this lifetime. After the Darshan, we would leave it for you to touch the Divine being.

Hindu Dharma: 18 – Vishnu Darshan

Bhupendra Ratanji Hajratwala, Ph.D. - Pleasanton, California, USA

Email: hajratwala@yahoo.com; Phone; (925) 846-3521

According to our scriptures, we would achieve Moksha if we have darshan of Lord Vishnu. We generally think of visiting a temple for Lord Vishnu's darshan. However, this will not do in order to achieve Moksha or else all the devotees who visit Vishnu's temple would have received Moksha.

The name Vishnu means that which permeates through even the smallest of the particles. Thus, meaning He is everywhere and in everything. If we recall the story of Prahlad, Lord Vishnu appears as Narsinha from the palace pillar. So, now it is up to us see Vishnu everywhere and in everything.

To make this seemingly simple yet extremely difficult task 'easy', the scriptures give us a magical Vishnu mantra, '*Shree Krishnam Vande Jagat Guru*' in Sanskrit. It is not necessary to recite this mantra thousands of time but it is important to understand it thoroughly. It is even more important to put it in practice. Only then you will see Lord Vishnu for sure.

The word Shree is for Lakshmi, Krishna's consort or energy. Reciting her name before Krishna's name honors her. Krishnam means to the Lord Krishna. Vishnu has many avatars. Because Lord Vishnu (as Krishna) led a human life and gave countless lessons He is worshiped as our Guru. Vande means to pay respects or obeisance by bowing down before Him. Jagat means that which moves (lit: world). Thus, He acts as a guru to anything and everything that is capable of any movement. So thus far, we know the literal meaning. Now let us put it in practice.

Where is this Krishna that you can see? Krishna resides in all of us. It is important to appreciate that it is not just any deity that resides in us but Vishnu. It is not Brahma or Shiva. It is Vishnu because He sustains life. He is the preserver. Since, He is our guru He teaches us at every opportunity and moment. It is up to us to learn. Through seers and swamis He teaches us what to do and with many others He teaches us what not to do. It is important to remember to learn from every one - that includes not just saints and seers but also from everyone including those idiots of the world, little children, and the most repulsive of beings. Learning from the latter may be difficult to comprehend but with time and practice, we will learn what Lord Vishnu has to teach. So, next time a child throws a tantrum, don't get mad at him. Pause and see what it is that the Lord Krishna is trying to teach us. When you can see the lesson He is teaching, you will learn. When you will learn, you will see the Lord Vishnu in this naughty child. In your mind, bow down and pray to Him and thank Him for the lesson He has taught you. You are indeed walking straight down the Moksha path.

In the next article, we will discuss how to achieve the divine Darshan of Lord Shiva.

Hindu Dharma: 19 – Shiva Darshan

Bhupendra Ratanji Hajratwala, Ph.D. - Pleasanton, California, USA

Email: hajratwala@yahoo.com; Phone; (925) 846-3521

According to our scriptures, we would achieve Moksha if we have darshan of Lord Shiva. We generally think of visiting a temple for Lord Shiva's darshan. However, this will not do in order to achieve Moksha or else all the devotees who visit Shiva's temple would have received Moksha.

The name Shiva has multiple meanings such as auspicious, pure, or destroyer. But even more important than understanding the meaning of the name Shiva, it is important to know who Shiva is. Shiva is time. Time must be correctly understood. Time was never born and time will never end. For all the sentences, you can read them by substituting Shiva in place of time and you will have a better understanding of Shiva. Time is prakriti (meaning nature) and thus on its own it cannot do anything (hence, Shiva is impotent), however everything that ever was created does get destroyed with time (hence, Shiva is destroyer). Now for the Shiva Darshan, we need to know where Shiva is.

Unlike Vishnu, who resides in all of us, Lord Shiva is always along our side. Thus we are never alone. It is up to us to recognize Shiva and also to learn to respect Him and follow His guidance. The scriptures teach us that a simple way to learn to recognize Shiva by our side is to learn to see Him by other people's side. You will then see how they either respect Him or completely ignore or disrespect Him.

We respect gods by our tann (body), mann (mind), and dhan (wealth). When you see a person doing physical or mental work beyond his ability then he is ignoring the advice that Lord Shiva is giving him. When you see a person spending his wealth beyond his ability or need and wasting it, then he is ignoring Lord Shiva's advice. Soon, he is bound to get in trouble. Shiva helps all of us unfortunately it is we who continue to ignore what Shiva (Kala or time) is telling us. Observing others either accepting or ignoring Shiva is not as easy as it sounds. It just needs patience and practice, practice, and more practice.

So, next time you see someone get in trouble either by tann, mann, or dhan; don't be in a hurry to help him out. Pause and see what it is that Lord Shiva was trying to teach him. When you can see the lesson He is teaching, you will learn. When you will learn, you will see the Lord Shiva seated right next to this troubled person. There is no need to teach him or lecture him about all this. Remember, he has Lord Shiva right next to him. In your mind, bow down and pray to Him and thank Him for the lesson He has taught you. If you can see Lord Vishnu as well as Lord Shiva everywhere, you are now indeed walking straight down the Moksha path.

In the next article, we will discuss how to achieve the divine Darshan of Lord Hanuman.

Hindu Dharma: 20 – Hanuman Darshan

Bhupendra Ratanji Hajratwala, Ph.D. - Pleasanton, California, USA

Email: hajratwala@yahoo.com; Phone; (925) 846-3521

According to our scriptures, we would achieve Moksha if we have darshan of Lord Hanuman. We generally think of visiting a temple for Lord Hanuman's darshan. However, this will not do in order to achieve Moksha or else all the devotees who visit Hanuman's temple would have received Moksha.

The concept of Hanuman must be correctly understood. He is an ideal devotee of Lord Rama. The sole purpose of His existence is to serve Lord Rama. Rama is Lord Vishnu's 7th avatar. So, it stands to reason that we would find Hanuman where we would find Rama. Previously, we have seen that Lord Rama resides within all of us. Thus, Hanuman cannot be too far off. Hanuman is a male deity and thus is prakriti (meaning nature). Prakriti by itself is unable to do anything yet prakriti can be very powerful.

Lord Hanuman is not married and is celibate. That means that He has no Shakti attached to Him. Our scriptures tell us that Lord Hanuman is the personification of our mind. Thus, our mind (that is Hanuman) is unable to physically do anything for us yet it can do incredible things. That it does by controlling all of our senses. Lord Hanuman forgets His strengths and special powers until Lord Brahma's son (a bear named Jambavan) reminds Him of His powers. Then and only then He can jump over the ocean and rescue Sita. Similarly, our mind too forgets its strengths and special powers. It must wait to be reminded of this until the most unlikely and ugly being will somehow remind him of his strength. Often in our lives, Jambavan comes not just once but often to remind us. Unfortunately, our mind is completely covered with ignorance and ego. Our mind ignores Jambavan repeatedly and does not benefit from his advice.

Once Hanuman is aware of his powers, He can jump over the great distances, become small as an ant, big as a mountain, possess incredible strength, and do wonderful things. Our mind too is quite capable of doing all these things. All we have to do is simply allow Hanuman in us to be free from the clouds of ignorance and ego. Once he is free, you just watch and see.

So, next time you see someone very indecisive, unsure of himself, unable to do things (without any physical or mental problems), pause and see where the Lord Hanuman is hidden. When you can see what He is hiding behind, you will learn. When you will learn, you will see the Lord Hanuman in this person even though He may be hidden from this person. In your mind, bow down and pray to Lord Hanuman and thank Him for the lesson He has taught you. If you can see Lord Vishnu, Lord Shiva, and now Lord Hanuman everywhere and within everyone, you are now indeed walking straight down the Moksha path.

In the next article, we will discuss how to achieve the divine Darshan of Lord Ganesh.

Hindu Dharma: 21 – Ganesh Darshan

Bhupendra Ratanji Hajratwala, Ph.D. - Pleasanton, California, USA

Email: hajratwala@yahoo.com; Phone; (925) 846-3521

According to our scriptures, we would achieve Moksha if we have darshan of Lord Ganesh. We generally think of visiting a temple for Lord Ganesh's darshan. However, this will not do in order to achieve Moksha or else all the devotees who visit Ganesh's temple would have received Moksha.

The concept of Ganesh must be correctly understood. He is blessed with the boon of being the first to be worshiped to remove any obstacles (Vigna) one may encounter before beginning any karma. However, like other male deities, Ganesh too is a prakriti (nature). Thus He too needs Shakti in order to remove obstacles. His two wives Riddhi (intelligence) and Siddhi (special powers) are his Shaktis.

Does Lord Ganesh come when we worship him to remove our troubles? Yes, indeed He does come. It is for us to recognize Him. Let us take a simple case of having a party on a hot day. Our ceiling fan stops working. This indeed is an obstacle in our karma. So, we pray to Lord Ganesh to remove this minor obstacle. Lord Ganesh will appear before us as an electrician who can repair the fan. However, the electrician himself cannot do any repairs unless he has the knowledge to repair (Riddhi) and proper tools (Siddhi) to work with. If any one of the Shakti is missing, Ganesh cannot remove the obstacle. We have to call another electrician. That means Lord Ganesh must come again with both his Shaktis.

Our scriptures show child Ganesh with his mother Parvati. However, the adult Ganesh is usually shown seated with two goddesses, Lakshmi and Saraswati. Thus, obstacles are best removed in the presence of both the knowledge and means (wealth). The presence of force or power (Parvati) is usually not the most effective way to remove obstacles. The daily recitation of Ganesh mantra (*Vakratunda Mahakaya ...*) is meant to remind us that the help for our troubles can come from the most unusual looking objects or subjects. All we have to do is keep our eyes open and learn to see where Lord Ganesh is and in what form he is appearing to help us. Initially, it is a little difficult but with practice we will learn to see Him everywhere helping not only us but others.

Once you learn to look, you will see Lord Ganesh often. When you do, in your mind, bow down and pray to Lord Ganesh and thank Him for giving you the opportunity and knowledge to have His Darshan. If you can see Vishnu, Shiva, Hanuman, and Ganesh everywhere, you are indeed one of the very few walking straight down the Moksha path.

In the next article, we will discuss how to achieve the divine Darshan of Goddess Devi.

Hindu Dharma: 22 – Devi Darshan

Bhupendra Ratanji Hajratwala, Ph.D. - Pleasanton, California, USA

Email: hajratwala@yahoo.com; Phone; (925) 846-3521

According to our scriptures, we would achieve Moksha if we have darshan of Shree Devi. We generally think of visiting a temple for Shree Devi's darshan. However, this will not do in order to achieve Moksha or else all the devotees who visit Shree Devi's temple would have received Moksha.

The concept of Devi must be correctly understood. Devi is energy that is Shakti. She makes things happen. Let us briefly review the Devi concept. There are three principal Shaktis. Saraswati (intelligence), Lakshmi (wealth), and Parvati (strength). All other Shaktis are some form of these individual Shaktis or combination there of. Shaktis operate successfully in conjunction with prakriti (corresponding male gods). By themselves, they are either ineffective or destructive. However when all the Shaktis unite, they are the most formidable. This combination form of all Shaktis is known as Shree Devi or Devi. A woman is a personification of all Shaktis. Thus, all women regardless of the age and/or social position should be treated with utmost respect. There are many communities in India that actually worships women as Devi such as Charan community in Saurashtra. One of the Kshatriya Kuldevi, Khodiyar Mata was born in Charan community. Abuse of women in any form physically, mentally, or financially is considered the same as abusing Shree Devi Herself. The result of such an abuse can never be good.

Society in general considers abuse of a woman only when she is beaten or hit. However, subtle forms of abuse are rampant through out and can only be eradicated via educating both men and women. Abuse of women does not come from men only. Often women are the first offenders. Denying women opportunities to learn, advance in career or profession, or treating them to be an equal partner in a marriage is a subtle form of abuse. Such abuses deprive all members of the family and society at large of the incredible power of Shakti.

Because we see images of all Shaktis in scriptures as beautiful women, we find it very difficult to see Shakti present in all women. With practice, you can learn to look and then you will see Shree Devi often in all the women whether they are young, old, beautiful, or ugly. When you do, in your mind, bow down and pray to Shree Devi and thank Her for giving you the opportunity and knowledge to have Her Darshan. If you can see Vishnu, Shiva, Hanuman, Ganesh, and now Shree Devi everywhere, you are indeed one of the very few walking straight down the Moksha path.

Because all these darshans take much practice, the concept of pilgrimage (yatra) as 'easy' way to Moksha is popular. In the next set of articles, we will discuss various pilgrimage sites according to deities.