

Essays : 1

# Do all religions have the same goal?

Swami Dayananda Saraswati  
Arsha Vidya

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Tel : 044 2499 7023  
Telefax : 044 2499 7131  
Email : avrandpc@gmail.com

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Talk organised

by

Dharma Rakshana Samiti  
64 Police Commissioner Office Road  
Egmore, Chennai 600 008  
Tel : 044 - 2819 2438  
Email : [info@dharmaraksha.org](mailto:info@dharmaraksha.org)  
Website : [www.dharmaraksha.org](http://www.dharmaraksha.org)

**KEY TO TRANSLITERATION AND PRONUNCIATION OF  
SANSKRIT LETTERS**

Sanskrit is a highly phonetic language and hence accuracy in articulation of the letters is important. For those unfamiliar with the *Devanāgarī* script, the international transliteration is a guide to the proper pronunciation of Sanskrit letters.

अ	a	( <i>but</i> )	ट	ṭa	( <i>true</i> )*3
आ	ā	( <i>father</i> )	ठ	ṭha	( <i>anthill</i> )*3
इ	i	( <i>it</i> )	ड	ḍa	( <i>drum</i> )*3
ई	ī	( <i>beat</i> )	ढ	ḍha	( <i>godhead</i> )*3
उ	u	( <i>full</i> )	ण	ṇa	( <i>under</i> )*3
ऊ	ū	( <i>pool</i> )	त	ta	( <i>path</i> )*4
ऋ	ṛ	( <i>rhythm</i> )	थ	tha	( <i>thunder</i> )*4
ॠ	ṝ	( <i>marine</i> )	द	da	( <i>that</i> )*4
ऌ	ḷ	( <i>revelry</i> )	ध	dha	( <i>breath</i> )*4
ए	e	( <i>play</i> )	न	na	( <i>nut</i> )*4
ऐ	ai	( <i>aisle</i> )	प	pa	( <i>put</i> ) 5
ओ	o	( <i>go</i> )	फ	pha	( <i>loophole</i> )*5
औ	au	( <i>loud</i> )	ब	ba	( <i>bin</i> ) 5
क	ka	( <i>seek</i> ) 1	भ	bha	( <i>abhor</i> )*5
ख	kha	( <i>blockhead</i> )*1	म	ma	( <i>much</i> ) 5
ग	ga	( <i>get</i> ) 1	य	ya	( <i>loyal</i> )
घ	gha	( <i>log hut</i> )*1	र	ra	( <i>red</i> )
ङ	ṅa	( <i>sing</i> ) 1	ल	la	( <i>luck</i> )
च	ca	( <i>chunk</i> ) 2	व	va	( <i>vase</i> )
छ	cha	( <i>catch him</i> )*2	श	śa	( <i>sure</i> )
ज	ja	( <i>jump</i> ) 2	ष	ṣa	( <i>shun</i> )
झ	jha	( <i>hedghehog</i> )*2	स	sa	( <i>so</i> )
ञ	ña	( <i>bunch</i> ) 2	ह	ha	( <i>hum</i> )

· *ṁ* *anusvāra* (nasalisation of preceding vowel)

: *ḥ* *visarga* (aspiration of preceding vowel)

\* No exact English equivalents for these letters

1. Guttural – Pronounced from throat
2. Palatal – Pronounced from palate
3. Lingual – Pronounced from cerebrum
4. Dental – Pronounced from teeth
5. Labial – Pronounced from lips

The 5<sup>th</sup> letter of each of the above class – called nasals – are also pronounced nasally.

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### *Two-fold religious goal:*

This topic is a very important one because a number of people the world over, mainly Hindus, believe that all religions have the same goal. We need to objectively understand this topic without any prejudice. Let us look into all the implications.

One thing is certain—all religions have goals; this is not doubted by anybody. When one looks into the theology of any given religion, one thing that emerges is any religion is not meant for God, but it is only meant for a human being—male, female does not come into the picture. If religion is for a human being, then it should present the human being a goal which is desirable or which is more preferred because of a threat to some damnation after death. Therefore, what is this goal?

### *Dharma*

We can look at this goal in a two-fold way. One is *dharma*. It is held by good thinkers that all religions are committed to *dharma*. But then, is it the *dharma* of

a given religion, its own *dharma*, or is *dharma* universal? If each religion has got its own view of *dharma*, then even in terms of *dharma* we do not have a common goal.

Some of the popular religions that were not there before, in history, but have come into being, have a belief of *dharma*. This belief is rooted in their own theologies. When we look at a value like ‘*ahimsā*, non-hurting,’ what does a Hindu think of *ahimsā*? Is it universal? Or it is subject to double standard? Is it all right to kill somebody if that person does not accept another person’s religion? If he or she does not, then already this person is an enemy to God. That means God has already given the true religion; this has got to be accepted—lock, stock and barrel. And the one who does not believe this, is an enemy to God and, therefore, an enemy to the faithful. This gives the faithful a sanction, a scriptural sanction to killing; dangerous! The end becomes *the end*; it justifies the means. Danger begins here, where the end becomes so sacred that the means can be flouted. One need not bother about the means at all because the end is sacred. One can use

deception, one can use seduction, one can use coercion—all these one can employ because it is a religious sanction; it is justified.

The theologies are giving sanction for employing any means—fair or foul. Upfront nobody comes and tells me, “This is my belief—I am starting this hospital, I am starting this school, in order to convert you. I give you this help in order to bring you to my flock.” Nobody, just nobody tells me this openly. The end is so sacred that the means is not at all a matter for consideration.

In all the assemblies of the religious leaders that I have attended, I do not find any leader belonging to these popular religions accepting one universal common value. I have been struggling to make them accept at least one value. I proposed ‘*ahimsā*’ in one meeting. And they said, “We do not believe in it.” (Hush).

Later, in yet another religious leaders’ assembly I advocated, “Let us have mutual respect among religions. Let us promote mutual respect among religions.

I may not accept what you believe but I will defend your freedom to have your belief.” This is what I said. “I give you the freedom. You can have your own beliefs. One has got a right to believe, and so please believe. You respect me; whatever is my belief. I also respect you and we can live in harmony.” But they just will not accept that. They say that they cannot have mutual respect because having mutual respect means they have to accept my religion. I asked, “What is wrong in that?” They say, “It is wrong because if I accept your religion then your religion becomes true.” “If it becomes true, what will happen?” “Then I cannot convert you; I need not convert you. But, your religion is wrong.”

Where is harmony, Sir? How one is going to have mutual respect? Only the educated Hindus believe ‘all religions lead to the same goal.’

***For us dharma is universal—the very basis for one’s interaction***

For us *dharma* is universal. It is not mandated by anybody. It is not history. It was not given out by somebody,

a special person telling us, “Do not do this, do this. This should be done, and this should not be done.” Any given person did not give these kinds of mandates, in history, at a given time. Before the advent of that person also there were human beings; one cannot say that they did not have any matrix of values, *dharma*.

Every human being is endowed with a faculty of choice. That means one must have the matrix of values to base one’s choices. You have to make your choice, and I have to make my choice. If there is no choice and if both of us are programmed, then we will live according to our own programming, *svabhāva*. There is no problem. Once I have free will—I can do an action, I need not do that action, and that I can do it differently. So this free will is a tremendous freedom; you can blast the whole world if the power is with you! It is a freedom.

When the human being is endowed with such a freedom then it would be a lacuna in the creation if there were no provisions for self-discipline, and no mechanism to discipline oneself. A universal matrix of values should be

the basis, and one's knowledge of this forms the very basis for one's interaction.

***Ahimsā is not a negotiable value***

Look at this very clearly. I have to make choices. A cow has the instinct to survive. I also have the same instinct to survive. Any living organism has the instinct to survive. Every insect, every plant, every tree has this instinct to survive; there is no exception to this rule. Therefore, everyone wants to live.

A human being also is a living organism and has the instinct to survive like even the animal has. If a cow apprehends some danger it can kick a person, it can gore a person to death. The cow will have no regret. A cow is *vimuktaḥ—dharma-adharmābhyām vimuktaḥ*; it is above *dharma* and *adharmā*. So you want to survive and the cow also wants to survive. But, the cow does not know that you want to survive. However, *you know* that you want to survive and the cow also wants to survive; you know this very well. This two-fold knowledge is complete, backing your free will. Once you have the free will, then you can

abuse it. What is freedom that cannot be abused? But that you do not abuse is the wisdom. If there is no possibility of abuse there is no freedom.

Somebody tells me, “You please walk freely.” Right in front of me is a bayonet, to my left is bayonet, to my right is bayonet, behind there are three fellows with bayonets; where is the freedom to walk? Therefore, freedom means it is subject to abuse; even God has to stand and watch! That is freedom. Once freedom is given, then there must also be certain basis for choice given, and that is what we say, *dharma*, knowledge. This insight, this fact—that I want to live and others also want to live—I am not ignorant about; I know.

I do not want to get hurt, others also do not want to get hurt; this is the basic *dharma*. Every other human being also knows this. Therefore, we have a universal value, *ahimsā*. When we analyse every other value such as non-cheating, non-stealing, non-robbing, not telling lies, not taking advantage of a weak situation, we find they are all centered on one value—*ahimsā*. ‘*Ahimsā paramo dharmah*,

non-hurting is the basic value.’ This is Veda. It is not a negotiable value.

If *ahimsā* is the basis for all other values forming a matrix of values, then it is not taught to me by somebody. A mosquito is not taught, no monkey is taught in order to survive. It is given. For a human being also, untaught it is given. This is the Hindu vision, the Vedic vision of *dharma*.

***Dharma is one more manifestation of God and is not negotiable***

We go one step further. We do not say *dharma* is a mandate of God. We say *dharma* is one more manifestation of God. It has got to be, because it is given. It is given, right in your head, because the basis is knowledge.

You ask anybody with a set of questions; you ask a Benares Pandit— ‘Do you want to get hurt?’ ‘No.’ Ask a Harvardian. ‘No.’ Ask an Eskimo. ‘No.’ Talk to an aborigine in Australia. ‘No.’ If I ask you, ‘Do you want to get hurt?’ ‘No.’ It is universal, and only universal knowledge does not require to be taught.

It is knowledge that comes along with you, like even your breathing. The basic instinct to survive and the capacity to know that others also want to survive, gives you knowledge of *dharma*. What a device! This is basic to you, the basic person.

I am a cognitive, knowledgeable person who has this basic knowledge of the value of *dharma*, that is, *ahimsā*. When I deliberately hurt a person by cheating, by deception, by using foul means, just because I think that the end justifies the means, then I am going to be guilty basically. Then I need to be indoctrinated to really overwhelm my basic knowledge. That is why a lot of indoctrination takes place to a human being through religious theologies that do not accept the universality of this important value, *ahimsā*.

We look upon everything as a manifestation of Īśvara, whether you are a *vaiṣṇava* or a *śaiva*. There is nothing other than Īśvara. Everything is a manifestation because it is given. My body is given, senses are given, my *buddhi* is given; the faculty to know and the basic knowledge,

the software, is given already. It is loaded. When you buy the computer, it comes with Windows. You have it already! Everything else is addition. So, how can one go against one's own intimate knowledge and be without being guilty?

I cannot pass in my own estimation of myself. That is why I seek others' approval all the time. If I pass in my own estimation, I need not seek others' approval.

*Dharma* is to be interpreted, all right. That is why our vision of *dharma*—and that it is universal—is available for interpretation. Unless there is universality in what you think as *dharma*, there is no question of interpretation. Whether it is a law written, it has got to be universal, at least for the country or for the State, like the Religious Endowment Act; that is only the State act. Even that has to be in harmony with the constitution of the country. But there is no law without being subject to interpretation. That only makes me more responsible. That does not give me any license.

It is not enough to know what is right and wrong. I should be a *kuśalah*.

*Satyānna pramaditavyam, dharmānna pramaditavyam, kuśālānna pramaditavyam...*<sup>1</sup>  
 I must be a *dharmakuśalaḥ*. I must be able to interpret *dharmā*. Therefore, *dharmā* for us is *Īśvara*. However, even in terms of *dharmā*, all religions are, unfortunately, not holding the same vision. But all the indigenous religions more or less held the same view, until they were destroyed.

### ***Mokṣa***

We saw where all religions stand with reference to the first goal—*dharmā*.

What is the other religious goal? One person's concept is salvation. I ask, 'Who is to be given this salvation?' 'The condemned person, the damned person.' Am I damned? I am an individual, why should I be damned? Is there a creation other than *Īśvara* being in charge? Anyway the concept is, 'You need to be saved.' 'From what I need to be saved, you please tell me very clearly, from what I should be saved; I want to be objective.' 'From what I should be saved, Sir?'

In 2000 when the millennium started on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January, I happened

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<sup>1</sup> *Taittirīyopaniṣad* 1.11.1

to be elsewhere; there was a New Year gathering. One person asked me, “Swamiji, what is your message on this day?” I said, “I have no message, but I have a prayer.” “What is that prayer?” “My prayer is: O Lord, save me from saviours.” (Claps).

‘What is it that I need to be saved from? From my loans? If I am relieved of that, I will be very thankful to you, come on.’ ‘Will you clear my debts? Ok, that will be nice. Do you want to save me from any disease I suffer from? Please come and save. What you want to save me from?’ ‘From your sin.’ ‘Which sin you are talking about?’ ‘The original one.’ ‘What is the original one?’ ‘Because you have got parents.’

I do not accept this at all. I am a Hindu. I respect my mother, I respect my father; do not tell me I am born of sin, and that too in this country. (Claps). That is very ridiculous. Somebody died for you; I say, that person did not ask me at all. (Laughter). I was not even there at that time. So how can you say, somebody died for me? I am not responsible for it.

***For us freedom, mokṣa is the goal***

In the *Bhagavad Gitā*, Arjuna is addressed by Kṛṣṇa as, ‘Hey *Anagha!*’ *Agha* means *pāpa*. *Anagha* means, *pāpam na vidyate yasya*—the one who is blemishless. But in this country we are addressed as ‘O, *pāpīns*-O, Ye sinners.’ I refuse to accept that. Even if it is your belief, you have no business to address me as a *pāpīn*. (Claps). If I have some *pāpa*, I have to take care of it; I do not need anybody’s help. I must have the freedom to take care of myself. I refuse to be addressed as ‘O, Ye, sinner.’ We even do not have a word equivalent for sin. Sin according to them is the original sin and other sins; we do not have that.

Our concept of *pāpa* is *karma-phala*. It can be simple, or it can be little more complicated but there is no other *pāpa*. Even the word *punya* has no equivalent in English. Merit or virtue is but an apology for *punya*; it is not an equivalent. *Punya* is the result of a prayer, ritual; it is *adrṣṭa*, unseen result of a meritorious action. Any reaching out action produces *punya*. If this is our vision, then what

is it that I want to be saved from? Suppose I am already saved?

We have a vision like that. *Ātmā* is *nitya-śuddhaḥ*, ever pure; *nitya-muktaḥ*, ever liberated. If I am *nitya-baddhaḥ*, ever bound, there is no *mokṣa*, liberation, possible. If bondage is centred on I, then that bondage is real. That means, the 'I' is limited; there is no question of freedom from that. If I am already free, I should own it. This is what freedom is.

Freedom, *mokṣa* is the goal for us. When this body is alive, the indweller of this body, the *dehin*, gains a victory over *saṁsāra*, a life of becoming. *Mokṣa*, liberation, in other words, is here and now, while one is living. *Mokṣa* is not heaven-bound. Suppose the religion tells me, going to heaven is the goal, you better accept there should be many ways. Because to go to heaven one requires merit and one can earn merit in many ways. By doing one's duty one can go to heaven. Reaching out to people, doing *sevā*, one can go to heaven. Offering prayers, or performing rituals and so on, one can go to heaven. And, according to

some theologies, doing more harm to people, to cultures, to religions also, one can go to heaven! But please know that by destroying cultures, traditions, history, and people, destroying the core person in everyone, nobody can go to heaven.

Let us see, what is that heaven? It should be a place. If you do not need to go anywhere then heaven is here. If after death you go to heaven, then it is a place, and it is a non-verifiable belief. The goal is a non-verifiable belief.

A belief is a judgement before knowledge and it is subject to correction on verification. If there is life after death, then that is not subject to verification. There is nothing wrong for you to believe in that. But it is not subject to verification; it is a non-verifiable belief. That you can go to heaven, non-verifiable belief. Heaven means it is definitely a place. Place means it is within space and time. Naturally, anything within time and space is time-bound. Nothing wrong for any one to believe in a heaven; it is a human right to have that belief; that is fine. You can go to heaven. But that

there is a heaven is a non-verifiable belief. If somebody comes and tells me, “yesterday I went to heaven,” (laughter) and suppose you believe him. It is a non-verifiable belief, and you have got a right to have it.

In India too we have these kinds of beliefs; we have no problem with that. They say, ‘We will go to that *loka*.’ Please go. But if you say, ‘having gone to that *loka*, I will stay there eternally,’ well, that hurts my reason, anyone’s reason. Heaven is a place in time and space. If there is a beginning there needs to be an end: *tadyathā iha karmacito lokaḥ kṣīyate evam evāmutra puṇyacito lokaḥ kṣīyate*.<sup>2</sup> Very clean statement. Though *śruti* need not give any logic for its statement, it does give here the logic. *Yathā iha*, just as here—you came with a body into this world, a body that is subject to age and death—*tathā amutra*, same way there too (in heaven). Just as the physical laws, the universal laws, the geological

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<sup>2</sup> *Chāndogyopaniṣad* 8.1.6

laws and forces, how all of them operate here, so are the same elsewhere in place and time. Otherwise doing something here you cannot go there. The same laws should carry you there. So, just as anything achieved here in time is found lost in time, so too there. One may have a special body perhaps, but that must needs to be lost in time. That is acceptable. If going to heaven is *mokṣa*, then there are many ways to reach the goal.

Since heaven-going is time bound, having gone, one will come back like a bad penny—‘*te taṁ bhuktvā svarga-lokaṁ viśālaṁ kṣīṇe puṇye martyalokaṁ viśanti;*’ a very beautiful statement from the *Gītā*.<sup>3</sup> All those who reached the *svarga* that is vast and varied, having spent from the *puṇya* earned here, they enter into *lokas* where the mortals live. So one can understand what is this *svarga*. There is nothing wrong if somebody wants to go to heaven; one has got the freedom to desire to go to heaven.

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<sup>3</sup> 9.21

The problem lies here when someone says, “You can go to heaven, if you follow me.” This is a non-verifiable belief. Another person comes and tells, “I am updating Bhagavān,” and therefore he says, “Do not go after him, he cannot take you to heaven, you follow me, I will take you to heaven; I am the latest.”

Now, whom I should believe? One has got a right to believe. Believe. But the other person also believes something entirely different. Between them there is nothing to prove one is wrong and the other is right. So why do they fight? I do not understand this. How can anybody fight with anybody else holding on to a set of different non-verifiable beliefs? How can there be any dispute? There is no dispute.

There can only be harmony, granting freedom for the other to believe in whatever he or she believes. That is what we need in this society. You grant freedom to the other and expect the same freedom from the other to hold on to your belief. That is the legitimate thing.

***The Hindu vision of 'iṣṭa-devatā'***

The Hindus have got this vision called '*iṣṭa-devatā*.' Every Hindu home has a *pūjā* room in which one can find a gallery of Gods. When we show camphor light, *karpūram*, we show to every God so that nobody gets angry. (Laughter). It is true. If one more God is given to us, it is not a problem for us.

Please understand, we do not say all religions lead to the same goal. It is wrong. But all worship Īśvara, if they worship. Some religions do not have Īśvara. But Īśvara is replaced by something else, whatever that may be. The Buddhist will worship the Buddha who becomes Īśvara. There is no issue. Therefore any *iṣṭa-devatā* is fine, whether one worships Allah, Jesus or Lord Kṛṣṇa. But they have a concept that God who is sitting in heaven and created the world, and he is formless, beats all reason and logic. Does a formless God require a location? Does formless space require a location? If space requires a location, it is only in one's head, not elsewhere. (Laughter). One can have his or her

beliefs; I give you total freedom to believe. But do not ask me to believe all this; do not ask me. (Claps).

Honestly, I am telling you, we can live in harmony if we give respect to people to have their beliefs. And Hindus do not have problems in this. We do not think that God will be confused, if you pray in any language. One can pray in Latin or Greek; for God there is nothing Latin and Greek! If God does not understand, it is his problem; it is not your problem. (Laughter).

When the Lord is all-knowledge, there is no question of his not understanding! If you address him in French or English, or Latin, or even Italian, God will understand. You address him in Telugu, Tamil, or Kannada, he will understand. If you address him in Sanskrit, it is his own language and therefore there is no issue. (Claps). You address him in any language he will understand; he is not going to be confused. God can appreciate any language, any form of prayer, any form of worship. (Claps).

***All prayers are valid. But all religions do not lead to the same goal.***

All prayers are valid. Please understand this; all prayers are valid. But all religions do not lead to the same goal.

This is where the confusion lies. Prayer is a *karma*—*kāyikaṁ karma*-physical action; *vācikaṁ karma*-oral action and *mānasaṁ karma*-mental action. Being *karma*, an action, it will have result, a limited result. All prayers give limited results. We have sophisticated Vedic rituals. They will have more specific results but limited. We do not have just general prayers; we have got specific prayers for everything—for progeny, for rains, for wealth, for health, for memory and so on. That apart, all prayers are valid being *karma*. Coming from the *kartā*, the doer, *karma* will produce result. Therefore, all prayers are valid. But that is not the goal.

We say that the whole *jagat* is the manifestation of *Īśvara*. And therefore my body-mind-sense complex belongs to that *jagat*. And so I am asked to look upon this manifestation with *īśvara-*

*buddhi*, all that is here is a manifestation of Īśvara.<sup>4</sup> That is our vision, the Vedic vision.

For a Hindu the means is much more important than the end. Lord Kṛṣṇa says in the *Bhagavad Gītā*,<sup>5</sup> “...*dharmāviruddho bhūteṣu kāmo’smi bharataṛṣabha*—In all beings, I am the desire that is not opposed to *dharma*.” Remember there is a clause—*Dharma-aviruddha-kāmo’smi*. *Dharma* is me and *kāma*, your desire, also is me. While fulfilling a desire, you cannot go against me, *dharma*. Your desire is adventitious. It has come only now. But *dharma* is before; for me, for you. The one who desires to sell the car, and the other who desires to buy the same, are governed by the same *dharma*, which is common to both. That *dharma* is the basis and that is Īśvara.

*Dharma* for us is Īśvara and it is not negotiable. My life is committed to grow to conform to *dharma*. My inner growth is such that all that I like is what is to be done and all that I do not like is

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<sup>4</sup> *īśāvāsyam idaṁ sarvaṁ...* ( *Īśāvāsyopaniṣad* 1)

<sup>5</sup> 7.11

what is not to be done; then I am a made person. One may not be able to achieve it, but at least understanding what it is all about is to have a challenge in life. Therefore, it is worth living. That is our vision. First I need to be a master in terms of *dharma*. One becomes a swami, master of oneself. Afterwards one can strive for *mokṣa*. If you want to go to *loka*, please go.

All that is here is one whole and that is you. The whole cannot be away from you, apart from you. The whole should consume you, should be you. That is a vision to be understood, right here. This is something amazing, what we have. Therefore, let us settle for—all prayers are valid. Even this is not acceptable to the other two major religions because they do not accept other altars of prayer. We alone can say that all prayers are valid. Thank you very much. (Applause).

*Oṃ tat sat*

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