

The Spiritual Scientist

An ezine for those who think!

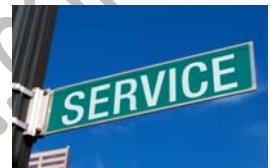
Dharma = Religion ?



Question: Are the words dharma and religion synonyms?

Answer: No. Religion is changeable; dharma isn't.

Etymologically, dharma comes from the Sanskrit root *dhri* which means "to support, hold up, or bear." So, the dharma of an object refers to its essential irreducible quality that holds up its existence. Thus the dharma of fire is heat and the dharma of sugar is sweetness; there can be no fire without heat and there can be no sugar without sweetness. What is the dharma of every living being? It is service. All of us serve someone – be it boss, spouse, dog or senses. We cannot live without service.



But not all service is equally productive. By serving our tongue, we get the misery of obesity. By serving the poor, we get the joy of charity. By serving God, who is the eternal, inexhaustible reservoir of love, we get the supreme happiness of eternal love. In fact, loving harmony with God – and relishing the happiness thereof – is our inherent nature. Presently, we are spiritually uninformed and so seek happiness by serving everyone and everything except God, but are disappointed again and again. In our current forgetful state, dharma refers to those activities that revive our spiritual memory and reinstate us in divine religion; all religions – and their rituals, worships, prayers and meditations – are meant to reinstate us in our dharma of service to God. If our religious practices infuse with a humble attitude of service, "I am a servant of God and all his children", then they take us toward our dharma. But if they inflate our ego by making us think, "I am great because I belong to this religion", then they take us away from dharma toward *adharma*.



Just as sugar doesn't change its sweetness by being transferred from a Hindu to a Christian, one doesn't change one's dharma of service by being converted from Hinduism to Christianity. To understand this unchangeability of dharma, let's consider a related derivative word *dhru* or *dhruva*, which means "pole." Just as the pole is the point that remains fixed while the whole earth rotates, dharma is that activity which remains fixed while everything else changes. Just as a person situated on the pole is unaffected by the changes produced by rotation of the earth, a person fixed in dharma is unaffected by the changes produced by worldly ups and downs. And the Hare Krishna mahamantra, which means, "O Father Krishna, O Father Rama, O Mother Hara, please engage me in your service" is a powerful, selfless, non-sectarian prayer that takes us beyond religion to dharma, beyond temporary material enjoyment to eternal devotional fulfillment.

