

3



What is Dharma?

DISCIPLE: I am not sure I quite understand how Culture can be called dharma. The fruits of Culture are happiness; are the fruits of dharma the same?

MASTER: What else do you think it is? Suffering? If it were suffering I should have urged everybody to abandon dharma.

DISCIPLE: Well, it may be that dharma fructifies in happiness in the life hereafter; but what of the present? Does it yield happiness in this life too?

MASTER: But, of course! What else do you think I have been trying to explain? The fruit of dharma is happiness in this life; and, if there is an after-life, then in that as well. Dharma is the only means to happiness; neither in this life nor in the next is there another.

DISCIPLE: But a confusion remains. We use dharma to mean Christian dharma, Buddhist dharma, Vaishnava¹ dharma, and so on. Should we not say Christian culture, Buddhist culture, Vaishnava culture instead?

MASTER: You have created confusion for yourself by standing the word 'dharma' on its head. The word is used to convey a wide variety of meanings, but the sense in which you have used it is not home-grown but merely a modern equivalent of the English word 'religion'.

DISCIPLE: Very well, let us hear about religion then.

MASTER: Whatever for? Religion is a Western term, and Western scholars have turned out various theories on it. It is another matter that not one of these theories tallies with another.

DISCIPLE: But is there no eternal law that can be found in all religions?

MASTER: There is; only, there is no reason to call it religion. Call it dharma instead, and all your doubts will be dispelled.

DISCIPLE: What is this constant substance then?

MASTER: It is the natural laws of conduct that hold true for all human beings, irrespective of whether they are Christians, Buddhists, Hindus or Muslims.

DISCIPLE: How can one know them?

MASTER: By seeking to understand the natural laws for all human beings.

DISCIPLE: That is precisely what I want to know. What are these natural laws?

MASTER: Simple. What is the natural law of magnets?

DISCIPLE: Attracting iron particles.

MASTER: That of fire?

DISCIPLE: Combustion.

MASTER: That of water?

DISCIPLE: To provide moisture.

MASTER: Of trees?

DISCIPLE: To provide leaves, fruits and flowers.

MASTER: And of mankind?

DISCIPLE: How can I express it in one word?

MASTER: Why not try 'humanism'?

DISCIPLE: Humanism? You will have to explain what it means.

MASTER: I shall. Tomorrow.