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### **The Science is a Verifiable Truth and so is the Sanatana Dharma**

After walking through high fields for about thirty minutes, I get to the small church and I am surprised by what I see. There are only about nine people and the building is much smaller than I had expected, but I am still very interested to experience the Kenyan church service. Although I believe strongly in my Hindu values, I have always been curious to know how other people around the world view their relationship with God.

As I enter into the room and observe the loud chanting and people circling the room, I notice a booklet on the chair next to me. I begin skimming through it and realize that it is a collection of articles published by the church, expressing the views they hold. Within ten minutes, I start feeling sick to my stomach. The various articles advise the following things to church members: don't take HIV retroviral medicines because only praying to God will save you, girls who are raped and impregnated are bad people who will automatically go to hell, and if you are not a Saved Christian than you are lesser than all other people.

It was in this moment, during my volunteer internship in Kenya last summer, when I truly began to appreciate the scientific nature of Sanatana Dharma and the logical foundation of Hinduism. This is not to say that all religions are illogical, but seeing the dangerous advice from this particular church helped me to realize how easily religion can distort science and vice versa. Since then, I have thought a lot about the tension between science and God, and why people often ascribe themselves to one or the other (which may explain why many people in the younger generation are becoming less "religious").

Sanatana Dharma is a lifestyle and way of thinking, rather than a religion. I think it is this particular distinction which makes our Sanatana Dharma so precious. Growing up, I always attended Bal Vihar and participated in discussions about Hindu values and the meaning of Sanatana Dharma. One point that was constantly reoccurring in these discussions was the flexibility of Hinduism and how one should not just have blind faith, but instead, should find the reasoning behind the rituals and sacraments we perform. I really admire the fact that our scriptures encourage devotees to explore questions and seek their own answers about the world.

Sanatana Dharma provides the guidance on how we can live life in a dharmic way, but there is logic and reasoning behind every aspect of it. In essence, you are not asked to just simply do something because it is "good," instead, you can very easily find *reason* and *meaning*. Sanatana Dharma is a compilation of practices that help instill discipline, create inner strength, and allow us to attain ultimate fulfillment from our lives.

Interestingly, as America and other highly developed countries advance technologically and scientifically, they are also becoming more aware and appreciative of the benefits of knowledge from ancient Vedantic scriptures. Two of the most cliché, but telling, examples are that of yoga and ayurvedic medicine. Considering the billions of dollars that are annually spent on health research and prevention strategies, it is quite meaningful that yoga and ayurveda continue to gain recognition and their practice is continually increasing. Both of these traditional practices have mental and physical benefits that can sometimes even be better than the benefits of technological and scientific advancements. In this way, Sanatana Dharma is eternal, in that it continues to be valuable and meaningful even as the world modernizes.

Even beyond this, our teachings contribute directly to the progress of science. Recently, the University of Dartmouth hosted a conference about Science, Vedanta, and Foundations of

Physics. Here, researchers from around the world presented their findings about the connections between Vedantic philosophies and science. For example, a doctor from the University of Montana presented her findings that the combination of ayurvedic medicine with biomedicine significantly enhances treatment of patients with neurodegenerative disorders. Dr. Anita Goel, from Harvard, talked about how Vedanta and biology can be used to study quantum effects in a single molecule structure. Although these research topics are quite complex for those outside the field, they show the scientific nature of Sanatana Dharma. Like science, Sanatana Dharma results from experimentation and practice and it is proven to be the Ultimate Truth.

Sanatana Dharma empowers individuals with a reliable system to discover Truth: Shastra, Acharya, and Vichara. Shastra is revealed scriptures, acharya is sages and teachers, and vichara is our own reasoning capacity. We must extract knowledge from our holy scriptures, seek gurus who can guide us, and, most importantly, use our own reasoning to determine what the Truth actually means. It is this third component of that I find to be the most intriguing because Sanatana Dharma does not ask us to accept *anything* without thinking for ourselves. Yet, even with all this individual flexibility, a concrete and everlasting set of practices still emerges.

Rather than imposing rules and dogmas onto one's life, Sanatana Dharma is a valuable resource which can help us understand the world around us. I do not feel forced to visit a certain temple everyday for a certain amount of time, nor am I constantly in fear of being punished by God if I break a ritual. Instead, I have the understanding of why we do what we do, which makes it very easy to act in the correct way.

A true scientist always explains the methodology behind what s/he discovers, and is continually searching for change and progress. Yet, through all the experimentation, certain central concepts tend to be upheld: gravity, force, energy, etc. Sanatana Dharma is a compilation of that fundamental knowledge, which is everlasting and ever meaningful.

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Dated: 7/31/2011 - 7:34 PM