

## The Importance of Duty

In the context of the Vedic way of life and other religions that have been derived from it, the great enemy is declared to be desires. But if one asks how we can function in this world without desires, and what about the desire for God, then some further explanation is required.

There are such things as good desires, and so we have to discriminate between those desires that are beneficial to us and those that are harmful. How is that done? There is a very significant term that can be expressed in just one word and that word is duty. Do your duty. And what is our duty? It depends upon certain principles, but also upon our stage of life.

The main principle, according to the Vedic way of life, is that we were born into this world as a human being, but we're meant to leave this world as a divine being. Thus our overarching goals should be liberation, *mokṣa*, and the means to it, which is living a life of *dharma* or righteousness. But we are also meant to be practical. Therefore, we should earn money and we should satisfy legitimate desires.

Thus, for the first 25 years of an assumed 100 year life, our duty is to prepare ourselves for a successful life. During the next 25 years, the householder stage of life, we're meant to earn money, to raise our family, and to satisfy legitimate desires. But then, when we're halfway through our 100 years, we're meant to recognize that now is the time to concentrate on our overarching aim to leave this life as a divine being.

We can't leave this life as a divine being if we keep on concentrating on the things of this world. Therefore, we enter the third or retired stage where the worldly approach that we have built into our psyche is gradually let go of. The final 25 years are meant for concentration on God, concentration on liberating ourselves from all attachments to this world.

Thus, while the statement that desire is the great enemy is correct from a certain point of view, we have to put it in a broader perspective and to recognize that the desire that is harmful is the desire that comes from the ego, that strengthens the ego. It is the ego or sense of separation that is our problem. It is that sense of separation that we are meant to be liberated from. A desire to do our duty, to concentrate on doing what's right, actually

wears away the ego, because our consideration is always on the right thing to do, not what we want.

Therefore the great significance of the word duty. It is our duty to do what is right rather than what we want. Desires are the great enemy, but duty saves us from the effect of wrong desires and leads us to live a life that can confer on us *mokṣa* or liberation.