



Shikha Rinchin Tiku

**Dharma Series:
Hindu Dharma
Simply Explained**

Volume 1

Introduction: Dharma Series

Dharma - Defined as the eternal and inherent nature of reality and regarded in Hinduism as a cosmic law underlying right behaviour and social order. Dharma signifies discipline to reach the ultimate truth of nature, to ultimate answers to all that we seek.

My association with Hindu dharma is by birth, but my relationship with it started a few years back. We're often going by or against the unsaid rule book. It starts with the family, the community, the society, the nation, and many other categories. I've mostly been a rule book follower. I've questioned a few rules on the way, and even rebelled them. The biggest rebellion being against the religion.

In late teens and early twenties, I was fed up of the God-men controversies and lack of knowledge. They seemed to have messed everything up. And lack of logical answers pertaining to religion added fuel to the fire. I'm from a home where scriptures are a part of life, but when a lot of my questions remained unanswered, and the so-called realized beings kept getting caught in controversies, my aversion towards the religion began. I shunned everything and started calling myself an atheist. This went on for a while.

Then one day while debating about a certain aspect of religion with a God-fearing friend from a different religion, I realized how little did I really know about Hinduism. After all, if I must shun it, I should have a strong reason to do so. And so, I picked up the Bhagwat Gita. That's where it began - my perception towards Hinduism changed significantly as I explored layers of this intricate, modern, and highly evolved dharma. I went on to explore Shaivism, Vedanta, scriptures, and am still pursuing the same.

Dharma Series

The dharma series is my humble attempt to bring forward some of the interesting anecdotes, learnings, and interpretations that I've read, realized, and loved during this journey. This is intended for people with interest in pursuing religious and spiritual paths. I'd love to hear your interpretations and experiences on the topics. In case you feel my interpretation somewhere is deviated from what you believe, please feel free to add your contributions.

Significance of prayer rituals & items

My grandmother was thoroughly religious and ritualistic. Her mornings would start at 3:30 AM and she'd visit the temple every day at 5:00 AM. She had this plastic basket that she'd carry with her to the temple. She used to call it her "*Mandar Tookir*" - "The Temple basket". It'd have some books, vermilion, sandalwood paste, mirror, *dhoop*, *diya*, copper vessel, fresh batch of flowers plucked from our garden, and more. I'd often be fascinated by this possession of hers and would often make my own "*pooja plate*" to carry some of these items when I'd go along with her.

While it piqued my curiosity, I never really understood the real meaning and significance of the items in her basket, or of the offerings that we make to the deities in the temples. So, I did the research and it left me awestruck.

While outwardly pooja may appear as a mechanical ritual, it has a great hidden significance. The act of pooja is a symbolic offering of one's thoughts, desires, actions, and possessions to God as a mark of devotion and surrender.

Let's now look at some common items used in pooja and their significance:

1. **The sacred vessel - Poorna Kalash:** It stands for mother goddess in general, or goddess Lakshmi in particular. The pot represents the mother earth, the flowers represent the ornamentation, the rice in the bowl represents either the material wealth or the powers of the goddess or both, and the coconut represents the divine consciousness.
2. **Food offered to the diety - Naivedyam:** It stands for the gross body (made of food) and worldly possessions. It is one's ignorance(avidya) that the body and the worldly possessions are real possessions, that's offered to God
3. **Flowers - Pushpam:** Flowers represent whatever that blossoms in you, be it good or evil, intelligence or delusion, and knowledge or ignorance. By offering them to God, you cleanse yourself. By offering flowers, the worshipper also declares their tenderness of his feelings towards God.
4. **Fruits - Phalam:** Phala means results. By offering fruits, we symbolically offer the deity the fruit of our actions and achievements.
5. **Incense - Dhoopam:** The smoke which arises from the incense represents our clouded consciousness, delusion and ignorance. By symbolically offering them to God we cleanse our minds and bodies and cultivate discerning wisdom.
6. **Lamp - Deepam:** It represents knowledge, wisdom, purity and divinity. By offering it to God we request him to endow us with these divine qualities & save us from the darkness of the mortal world and the negative consequences of our karma.
7. **Tilak - Coloured paste** Kumkum(saffron) and turmeric powder represent *tamas*(darkness) and *rajas* (*worldliness*) respectively. By offering them we seek the predominance of *sattva* (goodness).

Pooja is an opportunity for us to establish direct communication with the higher consciousness. During *pooja* our soul, the mind and the body wholly participate. We must have great reverence towards the process and perform it with utmost devotion.

I hope this article satiated your curiosity too. Please feel free to share the local folklore about the significance of these in your culture too!

Reference: Grandmom's stories, *The Hindus: An alternate history* - Wendy Doniger, *The Hindu Traditions* - Mark W Muesse , <http://www.hinduwisdom.info/>,
<https://www.sanskritimagazine.com/>

Why mantras are so potent?

I was walking in the lanes of a Chinese market here in Singapore, when I heard a familiar yet unexpected chant reverberating from one of the shops. "Maha Mritunjay Mantra" was playing in one local Chinese shop, and the owner was devotedly chanting the mantra in sync with his old recorder. I went up to him and I asked him - "Do you know the whole mantra and its meaning?", he smiled and said - "You chant it for a year laa, it will change your life" and went about his daily hustle.

Mantras form an essential part of Hindu Dharma, and each mantra is beneficial in a unique way. There are mantras to increase concentration, to calm you down, to ward off diseases, to bring harmony, and to even attain enlightenment. There are numerous testimonials over the course of centuries that vouch for their potency. So what makes these mantras so potent? Why certain mantras make us feel a certain way? Is there a science behind these mantras? Let's find out.

Mantra is a Sanskrit word, roots of which are "manas" - which means the intellect, and "tra" - which means to cross over. So, the mantras are a medium to go beyond the perceptual intelligence derived from the five senses of the body. In Maatrichakra - The Sanskrit theory of alphabets, the five energies* that Shiva is full of, is represented in the sixteen vowels of the Sanskrit alphabets, and similarly, each consonant represents various energies and levels of consciousness.

*Please refer to my post on [Aum and the theory of Sanskrit alphabets](#) for more on this)

Mantras are potent as they're a powerful combination of elevated positive frequencies that Sanskrit alphabets create. We all know how the quantum physics states that at a base level the whole universe is just a mishmash of various frequencies, and how scientists have been praising the Sanskrit language as a potent language for its precise phonetics and frequencies.

The fusion of the various Sanskrit alphabets in a mantra produces the consciousness that is related to a particular mantra. The repetition of the mantras deepens their resonance. And there's more. It is said that there are 84 meridians on the roof of tongue that are stimulated through Sanskrit mantras. There are scientific evidence* that mantras can stimulate the secretions of the pituitary and pineal glands, send signals to hypothalamus, and create a healing response through neurotransmitters and chemicals in the brain and the body.

*Research by Dr. Dharma Singh Khalsa, MD, researcher of Alzheimer's disease.

Mantras are an important part of the rituals, but understanding the meaning and the reason behind these is equally important. Personally, I have derived immense benefit from the chanting of mantras. Simple chanting of "Aum" 21 times a day can transform you phenomenally over a period of a few weeks.

Few simple yet potent Sanskrit mantras like Gayatri Mantra, Maha Mrityunjay Mantra, Astoma Sadgamaya could be easily incorporated in our daily lives, and can also be taught to the children, and can provide immense benefits to all of us.

I am thankful to my school MHAC Nagbani, for its roots in Vedic teachings of Arya Samaj, that introduced me to powerful vedic mantras. I am thankful to my late grandmother and my parents and for immersing me in the beauty of mantras.

The classification of Hindu scriptures

Indian scriptures are fascinating and intriguing. Did you know that the epic Ramayana has as many as 300 known different versions across India and other Hindu countries in Asia? The versions, the interpretations, and the depictions of the characters is varied across the communities. But Vedas, do they have versions too? No. Is there a specific category of scriptures that gets evolved over the time and regions? Yes. Then how do we classify the Indian scriptures? Let's find out.

There are many ways in which Hindi scriptures can be classified. The one that I'm mentioning here is something that I find easy to understand, and it is broadly classified into six categories - **Shruti, Smriti, Itihaas, Puraan, Agama, Darshana.**

In this post I'm writing about the first four categories, as they are the popular ones and the ones that appeal to the masses.

1. Shruti means "that which is heard". Vedas are what were heard by humans and not written by them. They are mentioned to be as old as 7000 years. It is the only category which has been passed on by the ultimate consciousness. We call that consciousness God, or superhuman. The four vedas are the only granthas which belong to this category.

The Four Vedas are Rig Vedas (The oldest one), Sam Veda, Yujurveda and Atharvaveda.

Each Veda consists of four parts: the Mantra-Samhitas or hymns , the Brahmanas or explanations of Mantras or rituals , the Aranyakas and the Upanishads.

The Vedas are the oldest books in the library of humans. The truths contained in all religions are traceable to the Vedas.

Each Veda consists of 4 parts, and these parts suit the four stages in a human's life as mentioned in the table below:

Veda Part	Containing	Benefit	Meant for
The Mantra-Samhitas	Prayers and Hymns for vedic Gods	To attain material prosperity here and happiness hereafter	Bhramcharins - The Student life(0-25 years of age)
Brahmanas	Explanations of Mantras or rituals	To perform sacrificial rites	Grehasthas - The Householders(25-50 years of age)
Aranyakas	Forest books which give philosophical interpretations of the rituals	To prepare people for taking sanyasa	Vanaprasthas - Forest dwellers(50-75 years of age)
Upanishads	Speaks of the identity of the individual soul and the Supreme Soul, reveal the most subtle and deep spiritual truths	Aid in attaining the ultimate truth and consciousness	Sannyasins - Last stage of life for attaining the ultimate(75-100 years of age)

There are also four upa-vedas, forming auxiliaries to the four vedas:

- The Ayurveda - the science of health
- The Dhanurveda - the science of war
- The Gandharva Veda -the science of music
- The Arthashastra - the science of polity

The Vedas are the fountainhead of religion. The Vedas are the ultimate source to which all religious knowledge can be traced.

Interesting fact on Vedas: While history credits Copernicus for proposing the heliocentric model of our solar system, it was the Rig Veda that first noted the central placement of the sun and other planets orbiting it in the solar system.

Rig Veda 1.164.13

“Sun moves in its orbit which itself is moving. Earth and other bodies move around sun due to force of attraction, because sun is heavier than them.”

Rig Veda 1.35.9

“The sun moves in its own orbit but holding earth and other heavenly bodies in a manner that they do not collide with each other through force of attraction.”

2. Smriti means "that which is remembered". They supplement and explain the ritualistic injunctions called *Vidhis* in the Vedas. They down the laws which regulate national, social, family and individual obligations. It is the ultimate guideline on how to conduct your life as a Hindu. The most common smriti often quoted is the manusmriti. However, there are 18 main smritis.

Interesting note on Smritis: It is also interesting to know that the laws of Manu were intended for the Satya Yuga; Yajnavalkya's were for the Treta Yuga; Sankha's and Likhita's were for the Dvapara Yuga; and Parasara's are for the Kali Yuga. These smritis would often evolve with social positions, time, and climate to keep up with the changes in the society. However, at a certain point in time this evolution stopped. And thus, some of what is taught in these smritis seems outdated and irrelevant to many. Some smritis are ridiculed by the modern-day religion critics, without realizing that they were meant for a certain period in history. In today's world, a new Smriti to suit the requirements of this age is very necessary, but who will take up the charge for that, is the question.

3. **Itihaas:** The common person cannot comprehend the high abstract philosophy of the Upanishads and the Brahma Sutras. Hence, the compassionate sages Valmiki and Vyasa wrote the Itihasas for the benefit of common people. There are four books under this heading - The Valmiki-Ramayana, the Yogavasishtha, The Mahabharata and the Harivamsa. These embody all that is in the Vedas, but only in a simpler manner. These are called the Suhrit-Samhitas or the Friendly Treatises.

Interesting note on Itihaas: Mahabharata mentions the Concept of Cloning, Test Tube Babies, and Surrogate Mothers. The birth of 100 kids of Gandhari was identical to cloning process. Each 'Kaurava' was created by splitting the single embryo into 100 parts and growing each part in a separate kund (container).

4. **Puranas:** Puranas convey the knowledge of vedas through simple stories that highlight the universal values, such as ahinsa(non-violence), daya(compassion), tap(penance) and daan(charity). They share strong examples of adherence to dharma despite upheavals in the lives of the characters. There are eighteen main Puranas and an equal number of subsidiary Puranas or Upa-Puranas.

One interesting fact about Puranas: I was reading some chapters of Garuda Purana - which talks about karma and rebirth. There was one section which mentions what happens to the foetus in the womb in its ninth months journey. Interestingly, the mention of amniotic fluid, placenta, composition of the fluid is exactly the same as the modern medicine describes. Interestingly, this Puarana was written in first millennium BCE, when there were no ultrasounds or medical facilities to know about such intricate details. How did they know it?

Well, that's what lies beyond our conscious prowess beyond the five senses.

Aum and the theory of Sanskrit alphabets

Sanskrit language is a fascinating one, the only language in which you can score a 100%, and is considered as precise as mathematics. According to NASA, Sanskrit language is apt for creating their computer programming for their Artificial Intelligence program. Sounds cool, right?

The mantras in Sanskrit have been life changing to many in the world, including myself, and it assures me of their divine potency.

Most mantras in Sanskrit begin with **"Aum" or "ॐ"**.

"Aum" or "ॐ" is often referred to as the sound of the universe, the sound of the Big Bang.

Interestingly, Kashmiri Shaivism in its Matricachakra - the theory of alphabet, gives a description of origin and significance of each alphabet of the Sanskrit language.

Writing about the whole string of Sanskrit alphabets will take chapters, so let me start with the origin of **"Aum" or "ॐ"**.

In Kashmiri Shaivism, Shiva is considered to be the pure consciousness and bliss, and the universe is considered to be the reflection of Shiva. Shiva, is said to have been in a shape of a concave mirror, and the universe is the reflection of this concave mirror. As science works, universe is the inverted reflection of Shiva.

Coming to the origin of the universe. Shiva is considered to be full of five energies:

1. Chit Shakti - The energy of pure consciousness. It is represented by the letter अ (a) of Sanskrit.

2. Anand Shakti - The energy of pure bliss. It is represented by the letter आ(aa).

Chit and Anand shaktis are inseparable. Shiva in his pure state resides in chit-anand spectrum. He is pure consciousness; he is pure bliss (चिदानंद रूपम्)

3. Iccha Shakti - The energy of will of Shiva. Please note that it is the will and not the desire. It is the state where the will to create the universe resides.

Iccha shakti of Shiva resides in two states: a) Non-agitated state is the iccha shakti in its peaceful form and the process of creation hasn't started. It is represented by the letter इ(i)

b) Agitated state is the state where Lord Shiva's will is agitated, and is represented by the letter ई (e). Although agitated, it is still not separate from his own nature. It still remains in Chidanand state (चिदानंद).

However, at this point there's an apprehension in Lord Shiva's consciousness, that if he goes forward and creates the universe, he may lose his own nature. And this apprehension takes place in jnana shakti.

4. Jnana Shakti - The energy of knowledge of Lord Shiva. It is represented by letters उ(u) and ऊ(oo).

a) उ is called unmesha. It indicates that the universal existence is about to begin, but hasn't started.

b) **ऊ** is called unata. It is when Lord Shiva starts creating the universe. However, he becomes apprehensive. He feels that his chit and anand shakti might lessen if he starts the process of universe creation.

He therefore discards the universe and remains in the stand still state. This is represented by letters **ऋ(ri)**, **री(ree)**, **लि(li)**, and **ली(lee)**. These letters are known as **amrit beeja** - A state where Shiva only resides in his bliss and stops the process of creation.

However, the chit and anand shakti recognise these apprehensions but are at ease, as they understand that creating the universe is only a glory to Shiva's own nature. So, they begin to create this universe. Here's how:

They create contact with iccha shakti, and create the letter

ए(ae) by connecting with agitated (अ/आ+इ) or non-agitated(अ/आ+ई) states of iccha shakti.

When **अ(a)** and **आ(aa)** come in contact with **इ(i)** or **ई(ee)** simultaneously, (अ+आ+इ) or (अ+आ+ई) letter **ऐ (aye)** is created.

Similarly, they also connect with jnana shakti, they create the letter **ओ(O)**(अ/आ + उ) or

(अ/आ + ऊ) and when they simultaneously come in contact in jnana shakti, they create the letter **औ(Au)** - (अ +आ+ उ+ऊ) or (अ + आ+ उ+ऊ) .

5. Kriya Shakti - The energy of action of Lord Shiva.

The letters **ए(ae)**, **ऐ (aye)**, **ओ(O)** and **औ(Au)** represent the four states of **kriya shakti**,

and **औ(Au)** is the most vivid energy of action, and represents Shiva's true nature. In simple words - **this is state when the universe is created!**

Now, the fact that the universe has been created and the nature of Shiva has not been lessened, and he's residing in his own point, is represented by the letter **म(m)** and is called anuswara. Thus, औ and म together make ओम् or ॐ and represent that the universe has been created as a reflection of Shiva, while he still remains in his pure consciousness and blissful state.

That's why **ओम् or ॐ (Aum)** represents the sound of the universe.

How beautiful and deep!

Reference: Interviews of Swami Lakshman Joo on Kashmiri Shaivism. May his blessings be upon us.

Mahashivratri | Spiritual significance

Most of us have learnt about the five elements of nature - *Air, Water, Earth, Fire, and Ether (Quintessence)*. These are supposedly the elements found in nature which also govern various laws of nature.

In Vedanta, 25 such elements (*tattvas*) are recognized, which ultimately lead to the highest *tattva* - *Shiva Tattva*. In Kashmiri Shaivism, this number goes up to 36, the ultimate being the 5 purest elements - also known as *Shuddha Tattvas*. These include:

Shuddha vidya, Ishwara, Shiva, Shakti, and Sada Shiva.

Sada Shiva tattva is one tattva that is found across all 36 tattvas. So it is the ultimate tattva, which is, but is not.

However, the final two *tattvas* of *Shuddha Tattvas*, *Shakti & Shiva tattva* are interdependent. And in these *tattvas*, we come to realize the subjectivity in its purest form.

The impression which comes in these two *tattvas* is - Only I, the pure I, the universal I. It is not "this universe is my own expansion" or "I am this whole universe." It's just I, pure I, universal I."

Mahashivratri is of a great spiritual significance since it is the night when the earth is aligned in such a way, that there is a thrust in the energies of every being in a way that can potentially raise them to the realization of the Shuddha Tattvas, ultimately to the Shakti and Shiva Tattva. This is the day when the possibility of this realization is aided by the nature.

Many anecdotes about Shivratri indicate towards the significance of this day. One such is the story of Lubdhaka - a poor tribal man and a devout worshipper of Lord Shiva who on one particular Mahashivratri went into the deep forests to collect firewood & could not find his way home. He became extremely terrified of animal growls and to seek protection till morning, climbed the nearest bel tree (Shiva's favourite tree). To keep himself from falling, he stayed awake all night, and plucked one leaf at a time from the bhel tree and dropped it while chanting the name of Shiva. By sunrise, he had dropped thousands of leaves on to a Shiva Lingam, which he had not seen in the darkness. Lubdhaka's all night worship pleased Lord Shiva and by his divine grace, not only did he survive, but was also rewarded with realization of Shakti & Shiva tattva.

In Kashmiri culture, Mahashivratri is the most significant festival, and is a 3-day long festivity, celebrated with great fervour. With a string of rituals, it is celebrated as a revered day of Shiva and Parvati's wedding. On this day, Kashmiri Pandits fast, and carry out the wedding rituals of Shiva and Parvati(a unique and beautiful part of the ritual worth witnessing), and chant spiritual mantras.

The idea is to stay awake, celebrate the great day, and pursue towards the Shuddha Tattvas.

This Shivaratri, I pray that we all realise the Shuddha Tattvas at some point in our lives!

Sources: Observation of Kashmiri culture over the years, learnings from Shaivism, Shivratri anecdotes, and Grace of my Sadhguru.

Rama

Rama - The ideal ruler, the misunderstood man.

Maryada Purushottam - Maryada means (righteous conduct permissible by dharma), Purushottam means (peerless - the best of the best). He, who was a role model for his state by the virtue of his conduct.

Rama is misunderstood by masses and it makes me sad. When discussing Rama with a lot of my friends, the only thing that is mentioned in a direct tone of sarcasm and ridicule is about him abandoning his better half, just because a fisherman raised a finger on her character.

“If he was so great, how could he do this to this wife? You are someone who strongly supports women empowerment, why are you defensive about him?” - asks a friend, sitting in a plush chair of his beautiful home, with a lovely painting of Buddha hanging on the wall.

“Well, Buddha left his young wife and child too, but he’s still cool”, I chuckle. But that’s not my explanation. Two disconnected things cannot justify each other, and I love and revere Buddha equally.

Rama was the ultimate ruler. He led by example. His conduct defined the conduct of his state, his “Rajya”. He was such an exemplary ruler that every state in Bharatvarsha wanted their Rajya to be like Ram Rajya - To have a kingdom and statesmanship skills like that of Rama.

To sum up sage Valmiki's Yuddha Kanda of Ramayana, Ram Rajya was characterised by equality, democracy, justice, peace, prosperity, longevity, good health, and happiness. How Rama conducted himself was an example for the trader and a pauper alike.

So when a fisherman raised a doubt on his beloved wife's character, and the rumour started spreading, Rama, overlooking his personal pain, first thought about his Rajya. The voice raised by a fisherman was equally important as any member of the court. If it went unheard, the equilibrium of Rajya would get disturbed. Society that stepped Rama up on the pedestal, could very easily accuse him of favouritism towards his wife. The chaste, powerful wife, Sita, on whom a man who may not have been half as perfect as Rama, had raised a finger. Rama did what he did because he knew that no agneepariksha(test of chastity) could remove the doubts that had been seeded in people's minds.

We must remember it was the same Rama who uplifted and saved grace of many women including Ahilya, Shabri, and Tara. But in this case, he was helpless. In his own Ram Rajya, he lived in the pain of loneliness, just to maintain the equilibrium in the society. Unlike other rulers who'd have easily taken another wife, he never married again. But to lead by example, he sacrificed Sita's & his marital bliss.

Understanding such sacrifice for a greater good requires tremendous maturity and inclusion. It requires a mindset of community welfare over personal welfare. A lot of great men in the history faced this dilemma. Rama, Buddha, Mahatma Gandhi, to name a few.

And Rama is the one of the misunderstood.

For Rama's integrity, his love for his wife, and his Maryada Purshottam status, for Ram Rajya and the possibility of it in the future - Rama in my eyes only deserves glory, devotion, and love.

Here's the excerpt from Valmiki's description of Ram Rajya:

न पर्यदेवन्विधवा न च व्यालकृतं भयम् ।

न व्याधिजं भयन् वापि रामे राज्यं प्रशासति ॥

While Rama was ruling the kingdom, there were no widows to lament, nor there was no danger from wild animals, nor any fear born of diseases.

निर्दस्युरभवल्लोको नानर्थः कन् चिदस्पृशत् ।

न च स्म वृद्धा बालानां परेतकार्याणि कुर्वते ॥

The world was bereft of thieves and robberies. No one felt worthless nor did old people perform obsequies concerning youngsters.

सर्वं मुदितमेवासीत्सर्वो धर्मपरोऽभवत् ।

राममेवानुपश्यन्तो नाभ्यहिन्सन्परस्परम् ॥

Every creature felt pleased. Every one was intent on virtue. Turning their eyes towards Rama alone, creatures did not kill one another.

आसन्वर्षसहस्राणि तथा पुत्रसहस्रिणः ।

निरामया विशोकाश्च रामे राज्यं प्रशासति ॥ ६-१२८-१०२

While Rama was ruling the kingdom, people survived for thousands of years, with thousands of their progeny, all free of illness and grief.

रामो रामो राम इति प्रजानामभवन् कथाः ।

रामभूतं जगाभूद्रामे राज्यं प्रशासति ॥ ६-१२८-१०३

While Rama ruled the kingdom, the talks of the people centered round Rama, Rama and Rama. The world became Rama's world.

नित्यपुष्पा नित्यफलास्तरवः स्कन्धविस्तृताः ।

कालवर्षी च पर्जन्यः सुखस्पर्शश्च मारुतः ॥ ६-१२८-१०४

The trees there were bearing flowers and fruits regularly, without any injury by pests and insects. The clouds were raining in time and the wind was delightful to the touch.

ब्राह्मणाः क्षत्रिया वैश्याः शूद्रा लोभविवर्जिताः ।

स्वकर्मसु प्रवर्तन्ते तुष्टाः स्वैरेव कर्मभिः ॥ ६-१२८-१०५

आसन् प्रजा धर्मपरा रामे शासति नानृताः ।

Brahmins (the priest-class), Kshatriyas (the warrior-class), Vaishyas (the class of merchants and agriculturists), Shudras (the servant-class) were performing their own duties, satisfied with their own work and bereft of any greed. While Rama was ruling, the people were intent on virtue and lived without telling lies.

सर्वे लक्षणसम्पन्नाः सर्वे धर्मपरायणाः ॥ ६-१२८-१०६

दशवर्षसहस्राणि रामो राज्यमकारयत् ।

All the people were endowed with excellent characteristics. All were engaged in virtue. Rama was engaged in the kingship thus for ten thousand years.

When an 8-year-old summed up the ultimate truth in 6 verses

Around 700 CE, by the banks of river Narmada at Omkareshwar, Govinda Bhagavatpada met an eight-year-old wandering boy, and asked him who he was.

The boy replied with a six verse extempore of what we know as “Atmashatakam” or “Nirvana Shatakam”. Govinda Bhagavatpada then initiated this boy as his disciple. This boy was Aadi Shankaracharya.

Atmashatakam forms the foundation of Advait Vedanta philosophy, and also relates to Kashmiri Shaivism to a large extent (With a few very clear distinctions).

The essential message of atmashatakam is non duality. Non duality - The ultimate realization that there is no division between I and everyone else, you are one with the existence. Quantum physicist have been talking about everything being just being energy at different wavelengths.

This is one topic which may seem beyond logic to some. But as you tread the path of spirituality, you'll realise that this is a possibility. More on this topic soon.

I'll leave you with what the six verses of atmashatakam or Nirvana Shatakam translate to in English. It speaks about everything that we identify ourselves with, which causes the illusion of duality.

mano buddhi ahankara chittani naaham

na cha shrotravijhve na cha ghraana netre

na cha vyoma bhumir na tejo na vaayuhu

chidananda rupah shivo'ham shivo'ham

I am not the mind, the intellect, the ego or the memory,

I am not the ears, the skin, the nose or the eyes,

I am not space, not earth, not fire, water or wind,

I am the form of consciousness and bliss,

I am the eternal Shiva...

na cha prana sangyo na vai pancha vayuhu

na va sapta dhatur na va pancha kosha

na vak pani-padam na chopastha payu

chidananda rupah shivo'ham shivo'ham

I am not the breath, nor the five elements,

I am not matter, nor the 5 sheaths of consciousness

Nor am I the speech, the hands, or the feet,

I am the form of consciousness and bliss,

I am the eternal Shiva...

na me dvesha ragau na me lobha mohau

na me vai mado naiva matsarya bhavaha

na dharmo na chartho na kamo na mokshaha

chidananda rupah shivo'ham shivo'ham

There is no like or dislike in me, no greed or delusion,

I know not pride or jealousy,

I have no duty, no desire for wealth, lust or liberation,

I am the form of consciousness and bliss,

I am the eternal Shiva...

na punyam na papam na saukhyam na duhkham

na mantro na tirtham na veda na yajnah

aham bhojanam naiva bhojyam na bhokta

chidananda rupah shivo'ham shivo'ham

No virtue or vice, no pleasure or pain,

I need no mantras, no pilgrimage, no scriptures or rituals,

I am not the experienced, nor the experience itself,

I am the form of consciousness and bliss,

I am the eternal Shiva...

na me mrtyu shanka na mejati bhedaha

pita naiva me naiva mataa na janmaha

na bandhur na mitram gurur naiva shishyaha

chidananda rupah shivo'ham shivo'ham

I have no fear of death, no caste or creed,

I have no father, no mother, for I was never born,

I am not a relative, nor a friend, nor a teacher nor a student,

I am the form of consciousness and bliss,

I am the eternal Shiva...

aham nirvikalpo nirakara rupo

vibhut vatcha sarvatra sarvendriyanam

na cha sangatham naiva muktir na meyaha

chidananda rupah shivo'ham shivo'ham

I am devoid of duality, my form is formlessness,

I exist everywhere, pervading all senses,

I am neither attached, neither free nor captive,

I am the form of consciousness and bliss,

I am the eternal Shiva...

Note: The story about the meeting between Govinda Bhagavatpada and Adi Shankaracharya has different versions. Some mention Shankaracharya was between 12-16 years old at the time of meeting. Some also say that Aadi Shankaracharya stopped the flooding of the cave where Govinda Bhagavatpada was meditating, and that's when they met for the first time.

