Stages and Goals of Life

What are the main goals of life and how are they related?

According to Sanatan Dharm, the goals that pursue at various stages of our life are: Arth, Kam, Dharm and Moksh.

Dharm

Our specific and rightful duties define our dharm. Our dharm can be a combination of things, and as we progress through life, different stages call for different dharms. For example, the dharm of student and that of a retired person will be very different. Tuning in to the inner guide of our heart through spiritual practices can help us to understand our dharm and, therefore play our role to the fullest at every stage of life—life after life—as we progress towards Moksh.

Arth

Arth is the pursuit of material wealth, which brings us the material comforts that we need. Ensuring that we are able to satisfy our material needs can help us to better focus on our ultimate goal of union with the Divine. Arth is a means to an end, not an end in itself; therefore it is important to find the right balance and not become attached to the possession or attainment of wealth. Arth pursued with awareness and detachment is in line with the pursuit of the Divine, because, within Sanatan Dharm, wealth is also seen as a form of the Divine.

Kam

Kam is about the fulfillment of our desires in various forms: wealth, power, sensual pleasure, recognition, etc. Within Sanatan Dharm, Kam should be fulfilled in a state of awareness and without harming anyone in the process. To progress toward liberation, we need to move past our desires, either by fulfilling them or by leaving them behind as we evolve spiritually; suppressing desires is not recommended as any related frustration could slow down our spiritual progress.

Moksh

Within Sanatan Dharm, Moksh (Liberation, freedom) is our ultimate goal. It is a state of non-ego, where the "me" vanishes and one stands free from all desires, actions and consequences. Vedant declares that our real nature is divine: pure, perfect, everlastingly free. We do not have to become Brahman; we are Brahman: *Aham Bramhasmi*. Our true self, the atman, is one with Brahman.

Why are there 'stages' to life? How are they related?

According to Sanatan Dharm, there are four stages of life, each with distinct characteristics and goals. All of these stages present us with opportunities to perfect ourselves in our quest for Moksh.

While it is possible to attain Moksh at any stage of life, clarifying the roles, responsibilities and goals of each stage of our life can help us to attain material and spiritual success by taking the most appropriate actions at each stage.

The fourth and final stage of life according to Sanatan Dharm is sanyas. In this stage, retired from professional life, we can devote all of our time to spiritual practices aimed at attaining Moksh and preparing for a new life.

The third stage is vanprast. Generally, as we move into middle-age after having successfully attained the goals of grihast, and as we prepare for retirement while fulfilling our remaining familial and social responsibilities, vanprast allow us to detach ourselves gradually and to devote more and more time to spiritual activities.

The second stage is grihast, or the stage of the householder. This is the stage where we perform our dharm by taking on a profession and by contributing actively to the betterment of society. Besides specific duties related to one's profession, grihast also includes: marrying and having children; household and social rituals and spiritual activities; and sharing spiritual knowledge acquired in bramhachar—and perfected during grihast—with close ones.

The first stage of life is bramhachar, or the stage of the student. This is the stage of our life when we should acquire the knowledge and wisdom that can enable us to lead a useful and righteous life later on. The dharm of a student includes being obedient, respectful, celibate, non-violent as well as studious.

Death and Rebirth