

# Vishnu Rahasya: The Four Purusharthas

Though the basic definition of what Purushartha is, happens to be well understood by most genuine Hindus (and equally well misunderstood by ‘liberals’) there aren’t many sources that expound well on the details of this concept. The ‘**Vishnu Rahasya**’ grantha written by Sri Badarayana is one of the few extant works that dwells into this concept in considerable depth. The following is an attempt to explain some of the concepts associated with Purushurtha as given in the Vishnu Rahasya.

## Purushartha

In the 48th of chapter of Vishnu Rahasya, a discussion between Medhatithi and Suta provides us wonderful insights into this concept. Medhatithi questions Suta and requests him to define what Purushartha is, to which Suta replies as follows:

इष्टत्वात् सर्वजन्तूनां प्रार्थ्यमाना यतश्च तैः ।  
ततस्ते पुरुषार्था स्युर्दृष्टादृष्टहेतवः ॥

*“Since it is desired by all living beings, and since it is prayed for by all, the word Purushartha is so-called; It is an instrument to obtain drushta and adrushta ishtas”*

The word Purushartha therefore means that which is desired/prayed for by all living beings (Purusha). The word Purusha here, clearly, does not stand for its alternate definition of ‘man’ or ‘male’. In this context, anything that is a chetana – a living entity – is a Purusha.

Suta further explains that Purushartha is that instrument through which one can obtain इष्ट (ishta). Ishta here can be understood as that which one desires. It can also mean that which is good for an individual.

दुःखहानिः सुखप्राप्तिरितीष्टं द्विविधं मतम् ।

The key attributes of ishta are two fold – (a) dukha-hani (removal of sorrow) and (b) sukha-prapti (obtainment of joy).

This ishta which Purushartha provides is of two types – drushta and adrushta.

The drushta type is that benefit which we can immediately experience in this world. It is a benefit that our indriyas (senses) can grasp or that which we can feel through our manas.

The adrushta type is that benefit which we can experience only later – many times only in swarga or other worlds.

So Purushartha is that which removes our sorrow and provides joy – both in this world and in the other worlds.

### **Types of Purusharthas**

धर्मश्चार्थश्च कामश्च मोक्षश्चेति चतुर्विधः ।

Purushartha is of four types – Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha.

Suta then ventures into explaining the differences between these four Purusharthas based on the benefits (ishta) each one provides.

### **Dharma (and Adharma)**

Dharma is that Purushartha which mostly provides adrushta-ishta and a small amount of drushta-ishta. In other words, the benefits of dharma are experienced mostly in the form of great sukha in swarga and other lokas, upon discarding this mortal body while a small amount of sukha and bhoga is obtained in this janma itself (on bhuloka itself).

There are two primary types of Dharma (when looked at from the point of view of ishta phala obtained) – tapas and dana.

Any satkarma (noble deed) which is done through our deha (body), indriya (senses) and manas (mind) is known as tapas. Therefore one way of doing Dharma is to constantly perform noble work through our deeds, words and thoughts.

Dana, the other way of performing Dharma, is of two types – by giving valuables to deserving persons or by sacrificing for the devatas through yajnas and homas.

The benefits of Dharma are anitya (non-eternal – they get exhausted)

इष्टहानिश्च दुःखाप्तिरधर्म फलमीरितम् ।  
तदपि प्राप्यते जीवैर्भूलोके निरयादिषु ॥

The fruits of Adharma are also two fold – loss of what we desire and obtainment of sorrow. The effects of Adharma are experienced in this world to some extent but mostly in Naraka and the other nether worlds.

Adharma too, just like Dharma, is of two types – performing those which are forbidden (by the shastras and elders) and giving up those which are mandatory (again per shastras or tradition).

### **Artha and Kama**

We saw in the previous section that Dharma is that Purushartha which grants mostly adrushta phala (results in the other worlds). On the other hand, Artha and Kama are defined as those Purusharthas which mainly grantly drushta phalas.

Artha and Kama chiefly bring results which are experienced and enjoyed in this world itself!

अर्थो हि त्रिविधं प्रोक्तो धनं विद्या यशस्तथा ।

*“Artha is classified as three types – wealth, knowledge and fame”*

Kama is that Purushartha which satisfies our worldly and material desires.

येनार्थेनापि कामेनाप्यदृष्टं जायते फलं ।

स धर्मरूपो विज्ञेयो दृष्टं तत्रानुशङ्गिकम् ॥

Suta then explains one extremely significant point about Kama and Artha. He says that there are certain types of Artha and Kama activities that result in the accumulation of some adrushta phala also, in addition to benefits seen straight away. In other words, some activities that work towards accumulation of wealth, knowledge or desires can also lead to intangible benefits that are experienced only in the other worlds. Whenever such Artha and Kama related activities occur, one must understand that the root of such activities is Dharma itself.

So, if the act of chasing Artha and Kama is also founded on the basis of Dharma (shastras, tradition), then they too can fetch benefits for the other worlds and further our progress in Samsara!

The benefits of Artha and Kama are also, just like Dharma, anitya (non-eternal).

### **Moksha**

कालतो देशतो वापि ध्रुवं स्थानं तु यद्भवेत् ।

तन्मोक्षः प्राप्यते विप्राः सर्वानिष्टनिवृत्तिमत् ॥

The common thing about the first three Purusharthas – Dharma, Artha and Kama – is that their benefits be it drushta or adrushta are anitya (bounded). Upon experiencing them either in this world, or in the next, they get exhausted.

Moksha on the other hand is that state in which one experiences results without the limitations of time or space. The results of Moksha are nitya – eternal.

Many a times it becomes difficult to differentiate between activities that correspond to Dharma and Moksha. The present definition comes in very handy in such scenarios. Karmas that lead to results but which are non-eternal (anitya) correspond to Dharma. Karmas which lead to results but which are also eternal (nitya) correspond to Moksha.

For a satvika jeeva (soul), Moksha is the limitless experience of sukha as per the inherent ability of an individual jeeva.

Moksha is of two types – sanmoksha and durmoksha.

Sanmoksha is the obtaining of vaikunta and other higher realms of paramatma by satvika jeevas. Durmoksha is the obtaining of andhatamisra, tamisra and other lokas by the tamasa jeevas.

Those who obtain Moksha never return to the cycle of janma and mrutyu.

Sri Krishnarpanamastu