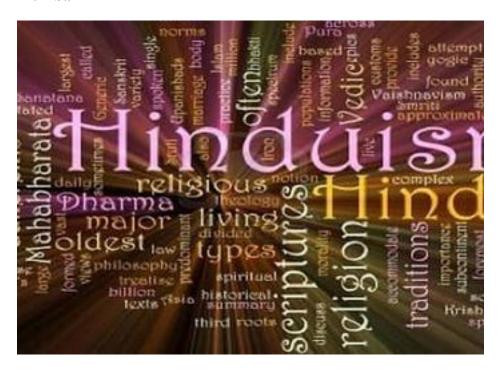
## Shaucham — Cleanliness Inside and Outside, Speaking Tree, 22 March 2017, Mumbai



The Bhagwad Gita in Chapter 13 talks about 'shaucham,' cleanliness, as one of the values to be cultivated if a person wants to evolve. It refers to both internal and external cleanliness.

Internal cleanliness means ensuring that our perceptions, opinions and decisions are not an outcome of our distorted view of things, but based on realities. This may sound easy, but in practice requires us to be rigorous in examining the validity of our ideas and thoughts, ensuring that we look at situations in their entirety, without getting carried away with our partial or erroneous perceptions and opinions -- which, in turn, lead to misguided actions.

Outside or external cleanliness is more tangible and is reflected by the extent to which we keep our surroundings -- our room, home, neighbourhood and nation -- clean.

I regularly walk on Carmichael Road, a posh neighbourhood in Mumbai. Every day i notice that BMC workers strive to keep the road clean as it houses a number of wealthy VIPs and top bureaucrats. In spite of their commendable effort, to my distress, I regularly see dogs defecate both on the road as well as on sidewalks, as dog owners send their pets for a walk and the walkers do not bother cleaning up behind them. What is more disturbing is that the remains attract flies, mosquitoes and make the road smelly and unpleasant.

These are often the very people who complain and blame the government for not doing its job. We convince ourselves that the system is not efficient and is corrupt. However, we fail to see that an unclean road is the outcome of a dereliction of duty on our part rather than inefficient BMC workers. I asked myself, is it not part of inner 'shaucham' for us to accept our role in a problem rather than constantly blaming others for it? If we are to evolve as human beings, we need to invest time and effort to see the real picture beyond our immediate perception, address our distorted conclusions and act more responsibly.

I thought to myself that one of the reasons for people being oblivious to their role in creating a mess on the roads could be that they never walk on these roads as they travel in the comfort of air-conditioned cars that zoom past. However, ignorance is certainly not bliss. The Gita reminds us that we live in an interconnected and interdependent world. The complex web of

things are organised in a way that our actions not only affect others but eventually come back to ourselves. Last summer, many across the city suffered from dengue. The residents of this road were also not spared in spite of their well-insulated, air-conditioned homes and cars.

I am convinced that nobody can escape the consequences of actions. There are seemingly imperceptible connections between our actions and their consequences. I believe that we have a choice -- either to continue to violate the value of both inner and outer 'shaucham' or to be more responsible.

The Gita reminds us that ignoring such values comes with its own cost that is detrimental to everyone's well-being. We should aim to follow enlightened self-interest. This is just one issue, but the idea of 'shaucham' can apply to every perception, decision and action we perform in our lives.

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