

Looking up the meaning of 'dharma' I was surprised to find many different explanations, but all of them led to the same meaning - 'the path of self-righteousness.

The word dharma is derived from the root *dhr* which in Sanskrit means to 'uphold' or 'sustain'. In Ramayana we see that dharma was the very breath of everyone's life.

When Kaikeyi exiled Rama for 14 years, he accepted and willingly gave up the throne to his younger brother Bharatha and happily left to the forest leaving behind all the princely luxuries and comforts. Obedience to father was the dharma. Sita was well aware of the hardships of living a jungle life, but still accompanied Rama to the forest to be with her husband. Bharatha, who was not a famous figure in the story, had the highest respect for his oldest brother. He did not accept the wealth and riches that the throne offered him because it came in a very unjust way. Jatayu the bird bravely fought Ravana and tried to save Sita when she was being kidnapped. Jatayu did not care for his own life and eventually died fighting Ravana. Rama praised the heroic act of Jatayu and granted him Moksha. Hanuman, the messenger of Rama, arrived in Lanka in search of Sita. Ravana wanted to kill him. Vibhishana, the younger brother of Ravana saved Hanuman from being killed. Killing a messenger was against dharma. Vibhishana also surrendered to Rama because he opposed the immoral activities of his older brother. Rama could have become the king of Lanka after defeating Ravana instead he crowned Vibhishana as the king of Lanka.

It is true that dharma has various meanings, but in a way it is an all-inclusive word for righteousness, morality, responsibility, and duty. To me, following dharma is exemplifying a life of selflessness, sacrifice for the right cause and offer service to the community. As times have passed, its practice has dwindled. World would be a better place if we all followed dharma.