

Ayurveda and Dharma



by Simon Chokoisky

AYURVEDA HAS REVOLUTIONIZED THE MODERN approach to medicine because it examines and treats the whole person. Ayurvedic *parikshā*, or clinical examination, can include looking at a patient's physical state, their horoscope, and even the layout of their home for clues to potential *doshas*, or afflictions. Parikshā literally means “looking around” and one cannot have a complete, 3-D picture of a human life without looking around thoroughly to get the full extent on their mental, physical, and spiritual state.

As a complete science of life, Ayurveda also works with other disciplines to assess and treat the doshas that have plagued people since antiquity. If the body is sick, it can be treated with herbs and other physical modalities. If the mind, senses, or *prāna* (the life force) is afflicted, Ayurveda uses yoga therapies such as *prāṇāyāma* to bring balance. If a person's relationship with their subtle, spiritual body is distressed, a look at the horoscope can shed light on matters of karma and causality. Finally, even if everything seems aligned, we must examine a person's dharma type to see if they are living a sustainable life or one that by its nature causes stress, anxiety, and decay.

Many good citizens nowadays are concerned with environmental sustainability and engage in recycling, reducing pollution, and minimizing their carbon footprint. However, true sustainability was developed thousands of years ago by the Vedic civilization, and epitomized in the philosophy of *dharma*. According to the Vedic seers, even more important than reducing your carbon footprint is minimizing your *karmic footprint*... and this is done by walking in dharma.

WHAT IS DHARMA?

Before dharma, there was *ṛta*, which in Sanskrit means “that which is right according to season.” *Rta* is the predecessor of English words like rite, ritual, order, arithmetic, ratio, reason, and others. *Rta* is also related to *ārtava*, which in Ayurveda corresponds to the female reproductive system, but also means “pertaining to the seasons.” As embodiments of Nature, women's bodies follow seasonal cycles—from the monthly menstrual period to the life-long season that spans menarche and menopause—the onset and cessation of menstruation.

Curiously, the English expression “in rut”, that is, “to be in season, ready to mate”, has this same Sanskrit origin, which demonstrates the concept of “a time for everything under heaven”. Animals instinctively respond to the seasons, rituals, and order of their bodies. Human animals, on the other hand, have choice, which has given us freedom to express who we are, but also confusion about how to do it.

Universal *ṛta* developed into the concept of personal dharma. The *Bhagavad Gītā* says that dharma is *svabhāva ja*, that is, “born from your innate nature.” It is not something you choose, though you can choose how, or even whether to exercise it. However, by refusing your dharma or doing another's dharma, you not only harm yourself, you can hurt others as well, which creates karma. Undesirable karma in turn generates *duḥkha*, suffering. These three concepts, karma, dharma, and *duḥkha*, are jewels in the crown of Vedic philosophy, the most valuable of which is dharma. Walking in dharma reduces your karmic footprint, minimizes *duḥkha*, and increases *sukha*, joy and happiness.

“...not even for the sake of your life should you give up dharma; dharma stands alone for all time, pain and pleasure are transitory.”

from the Mahābhārata

Working outside of your dharma is perilous, what Krishna calls *bhayāvaha*, fraught with fear and anxiety. Not doing what you are put on earth to do creates dissonant ripples of stress in your environment, which is ultimately unsustainable. Like maintaining a lie, the structures built to support a non-dharmic life buckle when tested by reality, and eventually come crumbling down. Living your dharma is like telling the truth; in the end not only you, but also everyone around you is better for it.

WHAT IS YOUR TYPE?

The table below lists the five dharma types¹, along with their purpose, element and *śakti*, or innate ‘su-

¹ To find your type, take the free dharma test at spirittype.com, or in Simon's book *The Five Dharma Types*. You can also read the descriptions of each type and see which fits you best.



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per power'. Living your dharma is a lot like wearing a superhero costume that comes with its own set of powers as well as Achilles' heels. Understanding your dharma type can help you play to your strengths and shore up your weaknesses in any area of life. Below are some examples of how to use these skills in your profession.

The Educator's job is to enlighten others, regardless of his or her occupation. Even as a cab driver an Educator may point out historical landmarks, quote trivia, and otherwise seek to educate passengers. Whatever your occupation, you cannot get away from your dharma. Educators are also supposed to make a living by not causing fear or harm to any creature. They are born to uplift humankind with the power of their ideas, not the might of their arms.

Famous Educators
Gandhi, Barack Obama, Tiger Woods,
Carl Sagan, Joan Allen

Warriors, on the other hand, are allowed to fight in order to protect that which cannot protect itself. Warriors make great doctors, lawyers, firefighters, police and military personnel. They are natural leaders and know how to take charge of a situation. The key is to have a just cause to fight for. A doctor fights against disease on behalf of their a, a lawyer battles for their client. But when Warriors lose their just cause, they are a Ferrari without a steering wheel, and need good counsel and guidance to keep them on the right path.

Famous Warriors
Fred Astaire, Buddha, Hitler, Paul Newman,
Rama, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Celine Dion

Merchants, whether selling trinkets on the corner or performing on stage, know how to make people feel good. They use humor, stories, and their own positive energy to put people in a good mood. This can make them great salespersons, actors, even motivational speakers. Merchants also know how to make money, and can become excellent entrepreneurs, bankers, and financial speculators.

Famous Merchants
Ammachi, Muhammad Ali, Bill Clinton,
Leonardo DiCaprio, Marilyn Monroe,
Frank Sinatra, Elvis Presley

Laborers have a talent for creating community. They are the rock that every society is built upon. They are unparalleled in professions that involve service, nourishment, and building the structures of society- be they farms and buildings or family units.

Famous Laborers
Marlon Brando, Deepak Chopra, Oprah, Kevin
Costner, Bruce Springsteen, Mother Teresa

Finally, Outsiders are the innovators and rebels of the dharma type family. They often study many things and put them together in unique ways. Their job is to refresh society with new inventions.

DHARMA TYPE	ELEMENT	PURPOSE	SHAKTI	MEANING
Laborer	Earth	To nourish and serve	Prema Shakti	The power of love and devotion
Merchant	Water	To bring comfort and joy	Utsāha Shakti	The power of effort and desire
Warrior	Fire	To protect	Prabhāva Shakti	The power of majesty and strength
Educator	Air	To enlighten	Mantra Shakti	The power of good counsel
Outsider	Space	To innovate & liberate	Ānanda/ Kaivalya Shakti	The power of bliss and freedom

Famous Outsiders

Jesus Christ, Lady Diana, Jane Fonda,
Jeddu Krishnamurti, Martin Luther King Jr.,
Johnny Depp, Osho, John Lennon

PAST AND PRESENT

Notice that there are five dharma types. In Vedic times, four were primary: the Educator, Warrior, Merchant, and Laborer. But the rules that applied in the Golden Age have to be adapted to our current *kali yuga*. Dharma is a law of nature, and like Ayurveda, it does not belong to one place or time anymore than the earth's atmosphere belongs to one country. The dharma type is universal, and is at home in India as in Indiana, in Amritsār as in America. The great yogi Vivekānanda, who brought the Vedic *vidyā* (body of knowledge) to the West, said that we must revise *smṛiti*, and reinterpret *śruti*. We must adapt man-made laws to our time and place, and reinterpret eternal laws in light of present need. Like the fifth Element, Space, Outsiders are the most subtle, pervasive, and influential type in today's world precisely because they are also the most abundant.

In the present age, the dharma types are not hierarchical, no one type is better than another is. They are also not hereditary; in kali yuga, bloodlines are unreliable. The best way to determine your type is through your horoscope, not your birth certificate. Finally, they are not transferable. One cannot become, through work alone, a different dharma type. Like your Ayurvedic *prakṛti*, your dharmic prakṛti remains the same.

WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME?

Love, God, and prosperity are on your path. Find that, and you find them all. Too often life veers off the dharmic highway, and by choice or mistake we get bogged down in the muddy byways of daily living. The intelligent way out is to hitch yourself to the dharma type, and let it tow you to your destiny.

Everything in life is relationship. Ayurveda teaches how to relate to our bodies for optimal health. Yoga instructs us how to relate properly to the mind. Vāstu demonstrates how to put order in our environment,

and the dharma type shows us how to find our purpose and live it. Together, these sciences open the way to total health and happiness. Consider Sushruta's famous definition of health:

Health is equilibrium of the doshas, balanced agni (enzymatic activity, digestion, and absorption), well-functioning bodily tissues, organs, and systems (lymph, circulatory, musculo-skeletal, nervous, and reproductive), and the efficient excretion of waste products (through urine, feces, and sweat).

This is just the first line. The second line completes the definition with:

"Fulfillment of the self, senses, and mind"

If you die craving a piece of chocolate, or regret never having seen the Eiffel tower, you did not lead a healthy life, according to this definition. The appropriate use of your body, mind, and senses is the purview of Ayurveda. The proper path to self-fulfillment is the domain of the dharma type.

About the Author

Simon teaches Ayurvedic Studies Program, Levels 1 and 2 Sanskrit as well as ASP 2 Medical Jyotish. He was born to Bulgarian immigrant parents in Phoenix, AZ, where he attended Arizona State University. Dissatisfied with a French major, he turned to Ayurveda in 1998 and, with Jyotisha, began his study in the Vedic sciences.

Simon has studied Vastu Shastra, Sanskrit, Jyotisha, and Ayurveda, and worked professionally as a fitness consultant and Ayurvedic massage therapist. He has traveled extensively, and speaks four languages, in addition to studying and teaching Sanskrit.