

THE DHARMA TYPES

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SINCE THE INTRODUCTION OF THE Vedic *vidyā* – body of knowledge – to the West, words like *karma*, *pundit*, and *guru* have become part of the English lexicon. With the arrival of Buddhist traditions to America, we even became familiar with terms like *duhkha*, and *samsāra*. But our understanding of *dharma* – our purpose in life, the natural law of our being and of every created thing in the universe – remains conspicuously absent.

Vedic philosophies are founded on three root concepts: the tripod of *dharma*, *karma*, and *duhkha*. *Duhkha* means ‘suffering,’ and suggests that it is impossible to find lasting peace from material existence alone. Witness that everything is perishable, including our bodies, and even the most seemingly permanent material fixtures eventually fade and give way to the march of time and depredation. By way of example, *Āyurveda*, the ancient science of longevity, aims to minimize physical *duhkha* through proper cleansing, movement, nourishment, and rest. But even the most assiduous maintenance only postpones the inevitable. Nothing is permanent in the physical world, nothing endures; change is the only constant.

The next concept is *karma*, or universal justice. Nobody, no thing, escapes the laws of cause and effect; knowing this, a wise person practices *ahimsā* (non-violence), or the Golden Rule, not out of some religious obligation, but from an earnest desire to have an optimal life experience by reducing undesirable *karma* and, ultimately, freeing oneself

of *karma* altogether. Everything you do, rubs off on you.

Finally, *dharma* is the sense that there is purpose to life. Without purpose there is only chaos and entropy. Without *dharma*, life is a series of random moments ungoverned by any natural order. The eventual question that a self-inquiring person must ask is: “Do I live in an orderly universe, or in a world of random chance?” The rishis of ancient India were secure in their knowledge that there was more to life than the transitory material (*duhkha*), that it was governed by inextricable laws (*karma*), and that these laws were organized to serve the purpose of our evolution.

In today’s world, this message has spread across the borders of time and territory to reach us here in the modern West. The rishis’ wisdom has led some of us to cultivate our spiritual self and minimize the suffering of identification with impermanent things (*duhkha*). It has led us to begin treating each other better in the hope of minimizing undesirable outcomes (*karma*). Yet even so, in spite of this general embrace of Vedic wisdom, we continue to furtively grasp and search for money, love, and God – or spirituality – in every direction we can think of. The latest guru, self-help technique, *yogāsana*, or scientific discovery promises to help us realize our desire, only to prove at best quasi-successful. The more we search outside ourselves for fulfillment, the more elusive it becomes. As we walk the path of our highest good, however, satisfaction chases us instead.

श्रयानस्वधर्मो विगणः परधर्मात्स्वनुष्ठितात् ।

*Śreyān svadharmo viguṇaḥ
paradharmāt svanuṣṭhitāt*

*It is better to be bad at what you do,
Than good at what is bad for you*

Bhagavad Gītā 3:35

This is the essence of Krishna’s teaching in the *Bhagavad Gītā*: do your *dharma*, and leave the results to Me! This sounds easy enough, and may have been clear for Arjuna who well knew his warrior *dharma*. But thousands of years and *yojanas*¹ away, how can we know what our *dharma* is, in order that we too may follow or abandon it should we choose? How can we walk the path of fulfillment without a map to show us the way?

THE DHARMA TYPES

THE ANSWER IS IN THE QUESTION. Arjuna knew his *dharma* because he grew up in an environment where it was part of his everyday life. Consider an analogy from yoga. In India, where walking barefoot, squatting, and balancing on uneven terrain are everyday activities, *yogāsanas* like *tadāsana*, *malāsana*, and *vrkṣāsana* may offer no special challenge. But for the average urban Westerner, who spends most of her time in shoes and socks, sitting in chairs, and walking on paved roads, flexibility and proprioceptive awareness may have to be nurtured before serious *āsana* practice can begin. In the same way, many Indians who grow up in a Vedic culture can relate

¹ A *yojana* is a measure of distance, said to be the terrain covered by an ox cart in one day: roughly 5 to 10 miles..

to the archetypes Warrior, Educator, Merchant, Laborer, and even Outsider, though their understanding of these is filtered through the lens of a caste structure that over thousands of years has corrupted them into a hierarchical and hereditary system that in the modern age serves more to bind people, than free them to express their destinies.

At the turn of the 20th century, the great yogi Vivekânanda, who is largely responsible for introducing the Vedic vidyâ to the West, said “We must revise *Smṛti*, and reinterpret *Śruti*.” That is, we must revise man-made laws and reinterpret eternal truths according to the needs of the time and place in which they are exercised. From the Bible to the Vedas, rules that applied 5,000 years ago may no longer be relevant to modern global society. Even the *Manu Smṛti (Laws of Manu)* teaches that dharma is not static, and must change in accordance with changing circumstances:

One set of dharmas is prescribed for men in the *Kṛta* age, other sets in the *Tretâ* and the *Dvâpara* ages, and still another in the *Kali* age, in accordance with the increasing deterioration characterizing each successive age. (Manu Smṛti 1.85)

That the caste system of India is built on the solid structure of four classes, or Dharma Types as I have designated them, does not mean that these should continue to be interpreted in a static fashion. While the spirit of natural law remains the same, its exercise must be modified to fit the times we live in: we have to recognize what is useful and reject what no longer works. For example, just as there are four great elements: earth, water, fire, and air, which effectively describe the sensate material world, there is a fifth, space, which is not discernible to the senses. This is akin to the difference between Newtonian and particle physics: the

first admirably describes the function of material reality, but breaks down when confronting subtler realms of existence. Likewise there is a fifth Dharma Type, the Outsider, who, like space, blends with the others but is never really part of them. While not traditionally included in the four-fold Vedic social hierarchy, the Outsider is particularly relevant to the modern age and the Kali Yuga in general, and must be understood if we are to adapt this system to modern usage.

In fact, the word used to describe Outsiders, *mleccha*, from the Sanskrit root *mlicch*, ‘to speak indistinctly,’ means “someone who does not speak Sanskrit,” a definition by which most of us today would be considered Outsiders! *Mleccha* more loosely means ‘barbarian,’ or someone who does not speak the common tongue. The conquests of empires over the last few thousand years, and the globalization of society today, has led countless persons to become displaced, losing their land and language, and becoming ‘barbarians’ subject to the rule of an alien status quo. Over time, this has led to Outsiders becoming the most populous Dharma Type, and one that requires special understanding.² In fact, we, as humans, are an Outsider species, different from other mammals by virtue of our large brains and opposable thumbs, the Outsider digits of the hand that make us unique.

The Dharma Types in the Kali Yuga differ in two further ways from their correlates in older societies, be they Scandinavian, Polynesian, or Vedic.³ First, they are non-heritable. The intermixture of people in Kali Yuga and the modern global society makes it impossible to determine Dharma Type by heredity. Blood succession may have been important in the *Kṛta* and *Tretâ* Yugas, when being born a Warrior assuredly made one a Warrior. But in

succeeding ages heredity has become less and less of an indicator, and more of a liability in determining Dharma Type. These days, it is almost absurd to believe that simply being born to an Educator has to make one an Educator. Bloodlines have ‘thinned,’ and what makes one a particular type is more complicated than simply looking at his or her parents. People carry the genetics of many generations, and the possible influence of many Dharma Types. Today, a look at the Jyotiṣa horoscope of the individual or a thorough self-test is perhaps the best way to determine the Dharma Type.

The second difference is they are non-hierarchical. All Dharma Types have equal rights as citizens, though each has a unique path to tread in living out its destiny. No restrictions, discrimination, or prejudice with regard to profession, marriage, religion, etc., are consistent with this system, though some types ‘match’ better in love and business, as discussed below. Enlightenment is available to everyone and joy, life, and happiness are as much birthrights of Educators as Outsiders. No one has a stranglehold on Truth, and no one controls the means to self-realization and fulfillment.

Finally, the Dharma Type is non-transferable. One cannot, through work alone, become a different Dharma Type. The quality and quantity of your work can determine how well you live out the dharma of your type, but it cannot change it into another. Some of us, especially in America where opportunities abound, think that with enough effort, anything is possible. While this may be true, effort must be tempered with wisdom to produce really desirable results. Knowledge of your Dharma Type is the foremost of such wisdom, as it is Self-Knowledge. ‘Know thyself!’ is the first directive, following which, all things can be known.

² Like Space, which is at once the most subtle and most abundant Element, Outsiders are the most populous Dharma Type, a fact borne out by proprietary techniques of Jyotiṣa (Vedic Astrology) used by the author to deduce the Dharma Type in the horoscope.

³ In fact, remnants from these older cultures are still very much alive, where words like kahuna and ali’i in Hawai’ian denote the Priest, or Educator and Warrior, or Leader Dharma Types.

THE DHARMA TYPES IN PRACTICE

SO, WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A particular Dharma Type in today's world? While the philosophy behind the Dharma Types is interesting, it is in the real world, in everything from romance to religion, that their true utility shines. Helping people to express their unique natures in a way that doesn't encourage competition but cooperation with others is something the Dharma Type teaches society. Guiding people to find health, compatible relationships, and rewarding professions is also par for the course, as is helping seekers find spiritual direction.

Consider the five yogic sheaths, from the *anna-maya* to the *ānanda-maya kośa*. Each relates to a Dharma Type, which is why for Warriors, the *prāṇa maya kośa*, and moving the breath – through *prāṇāyāma*, sport, or exercise – is essential, while for Merchants, whose affinity for the *mano-maya kośa* makes them more sensual and luxury-loving, stimulating the senses through beauty, ritual, and dance is preferable. Laborers respond to massage and kinesthetic stimulation, and Outsiders need mystery, the wonder of the foreign and unknown to connect to *ānanda-maya kośa* – their bliss body.

Consider also the 'ten commandments' of the yogic tradition: the *yamas* and *niyamas*. While the *Yoga Sutras* tell us that all of these codes of self-regulation "become a great vow when they become universal and are not restricted by any consideration of class, place, time, or concept of duty,"⁴ in practice it is useful to focus on one or two of these, especially as they pertain to our Dharma Type. For example, Warriors sometimes

have dilemmas about non-violence, because this may appear to interfere with their dharma of protecting others, (this was in fact part of Arjuna's dilemma in the *Bhagavad Gītā*) or clash with other lifestyle choices, such as eating meat, that otherwise promote their well-being. But for Warriors, *satya*, or doing what they say and saying what they do, is the first and foremost vow they must master. In fact, this alone can take them to enlightenment, because going deep enough into any one discipline can lead one to yoga.

Ahimsā is the particular vow for Educators, who are generally harmless and fragile. Educators like Woody Allen, Mohandas Gandhi, and Carl Sagan are beloved for their genteel lack of what one author termed, "the televangelist's plumy voice, the fire-hose gush of bonhomie"⁵ They endear themselves to others not through their power of arms, but their force of wisdom.

Likewise, continence (*brahmacarya*) is the vow useful to Laborers. Continence does not mean abstaining from sex, especially for householders, but using sex in the crucible of one's marriage. Laborers thrive on their communities, and building a big family goes along with their dharma. Saving their sexual ardor for their loved one and sharing it in this context, rather than wasting it frivolously, bears great fruit for a Laborer type.

For Outsiders, who have a harder time finding their dharma, it is tempting to grasp at and try to be somebody else. Though this is useful for a while, ultimately every Outsider must come up with her own unique expression and share it with the world. Therefore, *aparigraha*, non-grasping

becomes the vow best suited to their highest purpose. In the same way, among the *niyamas*, special attention to cleanliness for Laborers, contentment for Merchants, self-study for Educators, austerity for Warriors, and surrender to God for Outsiders leads to an optimal life experience.

The connections to subtle and gross anatomy go even deeper. Working independently of the Dharma Type model, medical researchers have categorized five 'brain types' with drives and qualities remarkably similar to these ancient archetypes.⁶ The Dharma Types also correlate with five distinct intelligences, manners of speech, secret fears, and even sports, which all relate to compatibility and personal relationships. This may be why for Educator-type Barack Obama, it has been difficult to relate to his Labor-type constituency, because these two speak fundamentally *different languages*. Had his staff known that bowling was a Laborer sport, and a poor choice to show off his Educator talents, they may have elected a better venue for him to connect with this constituency, and avoided the embarrassing media debacle it became.⁷

That is not to say that Educators and Laborers can never get along, but that it takes more work to ensure proper communication. That is why, perhaps, the sages who cognized these archetypes also cautioned us about marriages between such types – not that these bore any inherent sin, but that they required more careful attention than, say, unions between identical types, or types with inherent compatibility, as illustrated below.

DHARMA TYPE	GOOD COMPATIBILITY	AVERAGE COMPATIBILITY	POOR COMPATIBILITY
Educator	Educator, Warrior	Merchant	Laborer
Warrior	Warrior, Educator	Laborer	Merchant
Merchant	Merchant, Laborer	Educator	Warrior
Laborer	Laborer, Merchant	Warrior	Educator

Note: Special rules apply to Outsiders that are beyond the scope of this article to detail.

⁴ जाततिदेशकालसमयानवच्छिन्नाः सार्वभौमा महाव्रतम् ||३१|| Patanjali's Yoga Sutras 2.31

⁵ Gary Wills, in his book, *What Jesus Meant* (Penguin Books, 2006) p.23

⁶ In the book *Change Your Brain, Change Your Life*, (Three Rivers Press, 1998) Dr. Daniel Amen describes these 5 brain systems.

⁷ While basketball may endear Obama to Outsiders, tennis, polo, and rowing are some examples of Educator sports.

There are many other secret and sometimes recondite ways to employ the Dharma Type in one's daily life. One of these may be interesting to note. At the conclusion of each chapter of the *Bhagavad Gītā*, just before it gives the name of the completed chapter, a colophon in Sanskrit reads:

ॐ तत्सत् इति श्रीमद्भगवद्
गीतासूपनिषत्सु ब्रह्मविद्यायां
योगशास्त्रे श्रीकृष्णार्जुन संवादे...

om tatsad iti śrīmad bhagavad
gītāsūpaniṣatsu brahmadevyāyām
yogaśāstre śrīkṛṣṇārjunasamvāde...

Thus, in the song of the Lord, this upaniṣad, science of brahma, scripture on yoga, and dialogue between Kriṣṇa and Arjuna...

This colophon gives insight into the five ways the Gītā can be employed by the five Dharma Types. By calling the text a divine song, it evokes the Merchant's gift of praise and ritual (Merchants also relate to the *Sāma Veda*, which is composed of highly ritualized hymns).⁸ By calling it an upaniṣad, it gives a way for Laborers to enjoy it. *Upa+ni+ṣad* means 'to sit down near' a teacher and learn. Laborers love listening to stories of the Lord with faith and devotion.

It also calls the Gītā "a science of brahma", a path of wisdom for the intellectually curious Educator. As *yogaśāstra*, it is a scriptural guidebook for discipline and restraint, the way of the Warrior, and finally, as a direct dialogue between God and man, it presents an unconventional approach to the spiritual questions of the time. An unmediated dialogue with the divine is characteristic of the Outsider personality, who seeks freedom from the shackles of religious custom and ritual in the search for the numinous.

DHARMA TYPES & THE SILVER SCREEN

WHAT ABOUT PEOPLE WHO HAVE NO yogic or religious inclination. Is the Dharma Type mere philosophy, or can it be useful to the 'average' person who is less concerned with paying obeisances to the Supreme Lord than paying their rent to the landlord. The truth is these archetypes live deep within everyone, whether we are aware of them or not. The poets and artists of our culture instinctively know this, and some, like Disney have banked billions on our need to see them played out on the silver screen. Have you noticed that in Disney's movies, Warriors bear similarities in the manner they are portrayed, regardless of culture or skin color: the square chin, the broad shoulder, and the noble moral dilemma... like Arjuna, five thousand years ago? Such Warriors do not even have to be human for us to recognize them; look at Mufasa the Lion King.

Clever and intuitive writers know that to create a popular television program, it has to appeal to the widest audience. That is why shows like *Friends*, *Cheers*, *Entourage*, and *Sex and the City* are successful in America and abroad, because they represent each of the five Dharma Types and their unique characteristics, whether we live in Macon, Georgia, or Mâcon, France. Whether they know it or not, these writers tapped into the mores and manners of the Dharma types, from Ross the Educator to Chandler the Merchant, and put them on the screen for us to recognize and enjoy.

MYTHS

THE DHARMA TYPES ARE INDIVIDUAL Archetypal Myths, the I AM identity that guides each of us in subtle but definitive patterns. The late Joseph Campbell said:

"That which is beyond even the concept of reality, that which transcends all thought—the myth puts you there all the time, gives you a line to connect with that mystery which you are."⁹

Personal myths, or archetypes, are *apauruṣeya*, a Sanskrit word that means 'not invented by the mind of man.' Like the laws of gravity or flight, or the principles of Āyurveda and Jyotiṣa, they existed before they were harnessed by the conscious mind, and have been around as long as the universe itself. *Arche* in Greek means 'ancient, primordial' *En arche en ho logos* – "In the Beginning was the Word." (John 1:1) Also in the beginning was the archetype, the primordial mould into which creation fashioned life and spirit.

Whether we know it or not, we pour ourselves into mythic moulds every day. Fashion, movies, sports, and family all furnish different identities, casting us into roles like 'boss,' 'parent,' 'chic girl,' or 'Lakers fan,' thereby affecting how we behave and what we expect from life. But most of these roles are poor complements to the fullness of who we really are. The Dharma Types, on the other hand, are personal myths that have existed since time immemorial and will continue to be useful because they are the unseen matrices that guide how human beings express their destinies. Though *adriṣṭa*, 'invisible', their effects can be readily determined: a Warrior behaves like a Warrior and a Merchant like a Merchant, in organized, predictable patterns. This is because, as the ancient rishis told us, there is order in the macrocosm of the universe, just as there is order in the microcosm of our individual bodies.

If this were not the case, Vedic sciences that were developed to harness and interpret nature's orderliness, like Āyurveda, Vāstu Śāstra, and Jyotiṣa, simply wouldn't work. The fact that these disciplines have survived thousands of

⁸The Educator relates to the *Rig Veda* and its *upavedas*, Warriors to the *Yajur*, Merchants to the *Sāma* and Laborers to the *Atharva Vedas* and their *upavedas*. Outsiders have affinity with the *tantras*, *purānas*, and other peripheral scriptures.

⁹ From *The Power of Myth*

years of rigorous testing attests to their efficacy and the underlying correctness of their premise: Everything, from herbs and herbivores to people and planets, has an order that can be understood and harnessed.

In Sanskrit there is a saying that goes,

अमन्त्रम७रुम नास्ति नास्ति मूलमनौषधम
अयोग्यः पुरुषो नास्ति योजकस्तत्र दुर्लभः॥

*Amantram akṣram nāsti,
nāsti mūlam anauśadham
Ayogyah puruṣo nāsti,
yojakas tatra durlabhaḥ*

There is no sound that is not a mantra,
no root that is not medicine, and no
useless person, but the one skilled to
know these is hard to find.

The sages of ancient India spent their lives trying to cognize the effect and meaning of every sound; they called this mantra. They found the medicinal value of every vegetable, animal, and mineral substance in their environment; they organized this knowledge as Āyurveda. Finally, they sought a way to show human beings their usefulness, and mankind its purpose; this they called dharma. Every person can make a contribution and joyfully follow his or her dharma in the world, knowing the Dharma Types. ❖