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Dharma

PART ONE

Imagine if the greatest minds of our time all focused on one task, say, building a very fast car or flying a human to Mars- what do you think the result would be? If the folks at Oxford and Cambridge all had this one purpose we would probably soon be driving super-fast vehicles and watching humans walk on the red planet. This is what happened during Vedic times in India- except their inquiry was not material progress but spiritual evolution.

A Sanskrit aphorism says, "there is no sound that is not a mantra, no root that is not medicine, no person who does not have a purpose, but it takes skill to find these things." The rishis (seers) of ancient India devoted their lives to perfecting these skills; they discovered the effect and meaning of different sounds, and organised these into the Sanskrit language. They unearthed the medicinal value of every vegetable, animal and mineral substance in their environment, and collected this knowledge in the nectar-filled pot of Ayurveda. They probed the heavens, testing the symmetry of microcosm and macrocosm- how the stars and planets affect human behaviour- and systemised this knowledge under the lofty dome of Jyotisha- Vedic Astrology. Finally, they found a way for human beings to express themselves socially, personally and spiritually each according to their natures. These are the five dharma types: the Warrior, Merchant, Educator, Labourer and Outsider.





“It is better
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A long time ago our ancestors discovered that human beings share a basic quality- we all want to be happy. These rishis further understood that for lasting happiness, we must learn to live with Nature, not against Her. They termed this “dharma”- abiding by the natural laws of the universe. On the personal level, every human being also has an individual dharma or life purpose by living which they become fulfilled and joyful; abandoning your dharma on the other hand invites depression and malaise.

The Bhagavad Gita in chapter three says, “it is better to be bad at what you do, than good at what is bad for you!” (my paraphrase). Better to fail at your own dharma than to live a lie, the life of another. And this all sounds great, but how do we know what our dharma is? In the modern world of choice, where so many paths lead to multiple destinations, where is the compass to guide us to our personal promised land?

The three levels of Dharma

The good news is that you’re living some aspect of your dharma already. If you eat right for your body type, follow a basic Ayurvedic routine and practise asana regularly, you’ve probably figured out the dharma of the body and how to honour it by listening to its needs. Ayurveda and yoga don’t have to be complicated: if you’re hot and it’s midday, put on a hat. If you feel stiff sitting at the computer, get up and touch your toes: live with dharma and it will live with you; abandon it and it will leave you as well. Amazingly, many people fail to notice even these rudimentary cues from nature and their bodies suffer the consequences.

In addition to the level of Self (the body) dharma also has a Social and Spiritual component. The dharma types work at all three levels, body, mind and spirit to help you figure out what is right for you. From the physical level of diet and lifestyle to the social and spiritual spheres, knowing your dharma type gives you a leg up when it comes to finding the right diet, profession and even spiritual practice. For yogis and yoginis this can be particularly useful.

In yoga, the yamas and niyamas are prerequisites for entering into asana practice. That is, you have to have a basic level of cleanliness, honesty, discipline and strength of character before becoming a yogi: you can’t be a schmuck when you begin yoga because you will not only disturb other students, but the power of the practice will only make you a stronger schmuck- and that’s not good for anyone! For many sincere students, however, looking at the list of yamas and niyamas can be daunting- even mastering one can be a lifetime challenge! This is where knowing your dharma type is indispensable. Let’s say you’re a Warrior- checking the table below shows that Satya (Truth) and Tapas (Austerity) among the yamas and niyamas respectively correlate to your type. Focusing on these will not only give you quick results in your practice, it will also help you master the remaining yamas and niyamas!



SOUL	Dharma Type	Spiritual Path	Yama	Niyama	Element	
	Labourer	Devotion/Service	Continence	Cleanliness	Earth	
	Warrior	Karma Yoga, Austerity	Truth/Prana Control	Austerity	Fire	
	Merchant	Ritual, Charity, K.Yoga	Non-Stealing	Contentment	Water	
	Educator	Wisdom/Scripture	Non-Violence	Self-Study	Air	
	Outsider	Tantra/Tabu/Mystery	Non-Grasping	Surrender to Divine	Space	
MIND	Dharma Type	Profession		Strength	Weakness	
	Labourer	Nourish, Build Community		Solid, Dependable	Stubborn, Dogmatic	
	Warrior	Protect, Enforce Truth, Justice		Leader, Strong	Cynical, Materialistic	
	Merchant	Happiness Brokers, Luxury		Fun, Motivated	Unreliable, Liar	
	Educator	Wisdom, Education		Virtuous	Fickle, Weak	
	Outsider	Innovation, Reform		Progressive	Blames others	
BODY	Dharma Type	Kosha	Exercise	Food	Brain Type	Emotion
	Outsider	Bliss	Exotic	All	Basal Ganglia	Anxiety
	Educator	Wisdom	Inspirational	Veg/Organic	Temporal Lobe	Lust
	Merchant	Sensate	Dance	Rich, Tasty	Deep Limbic	Desire
	Warrior	Breath	Aerobic	Protein-rich	Frontal Lobe	Anger
	Labourer	Flesh	Mechanical	Carb-rich	Cingulate Gyrus	Dogma

Satyam- speaking truth- really means controlling your prana (life energy or breath), since speech is carried on the breath. Satyam for Warrior dharma types means honouring your prana by using it to speak words that promote dharma. It does not mean never telling a lie. Where veering from literal truth promotes dharma that is still Satya, and the Mahabharata epic of India is filled with such examples.

Tapas on the other hand relates to discipline and self-denial for a higher purpose. Having a goal, a mark to reach is extremely important for Warrior types, and tapas, austerity, helps them get there. Whether it's hitting the next sales challenge or sitting in lotus for three hours, Warriors are willing to sacrifice their comfort levels in order to achieve their goals.

Tune in next month as we continue to explore the dharma type. Like knowing your gender, understanding your type can make daily decisions like how to eat, work and relate to others easy and productive.

SIMON CHOKOISKY

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