

‘Dharma’ has now joined other Sanskrit terms such as ‘Karma’ in our western society, but what does it really mean? The word ‘Dharma’ can be translated from the Sanskrit as ‘support or uphold’.

It is interesting that right at the start of the Gita we see the battlefield described as “the field of dharma” (dharma-kshetra).

In the Vedic tradition we can generally translate dharma as following agreed ethics, social order and traditional rites where there is the essential idea that we follow these then we will be ‘protected’. However, in the Gita this goes deeper where after Lord Krishna takes time to explain the nature of the soul, he goes on to explain to Prince Arjuna that by not fighting he would be rejecting dharma, i.e. his personal dharma. And that his dharma, as for all of us, is to assist him in discovering his eternal soul. This is not about ordinary moral and religious practices but about spiritual knowledge.

*“Considering your dharma, you should not vacillate. For a warrior, nothing is higher than a war against evil.” Ch2 v31*

We have a personal path for our soul, according to our own nature, and if we follow our dharma, our soul’s path, we can break through our karma.

*“Having made yourself alike in pain and pleasure, profit and loss, victory and defeat, engage with this battle and free yourself from sin (ignorance).” Ch2 v38*

*“Even the wise act within the limitations of their own nature. Every creature is subject to prakriti; what is the use of repression? The senses have been conditioned by attraction to the pleasant and aversion to the unpleasant. Do not be ruled by them; there are obstacles in your path. It is better to strive in one’s own dharma than to succeed in the dharma of another. Nothing is ever lost in following one’s own dharma, but competition in another’s dharma breeds fear and insecurity.” Ch3 v33 to 35*

And we also see the significance of dharma on a grand scale when Krishna states:

*“Whenever dharma declines and the purpose of life is forgotten, I manifest myself on earth. I am born in every age to protect the good, and to destroy evil, and to re-establish dharma.” Ch4 v7*

We are told if we align our heart with Life or the highest spiritual principle that speaks to us we will naturally follow our dharma and live in peace.

*“I look upon all creatures equally; none are less dear to me and none more dear. But those who worship me with love live in me, and I come to life in them. Even sinners become holy when they take refuge in me alone. Quickly their souls conform to dharma and they attained to boundless peace. Never forget this: one who is devoted to me will never come to harm.” Ch9 v29 to 31*

# Dharma

Finally, we see Prince Arjuna speak of Lord Krishna as representative of 'All that Is'.

*"You are the supreme, changeless Reality, the one thing to be known. You are the refuge of all creation, the immortal spirit, the eternal guardian of eternal Dharma."* Ch11 v18

By fulfilling our dharma as a unique expression of Life we will assist the evolution of the Whole. And remember ultimately there are no 'unspiritual' dharmas, where what is most important is not 'what' we do but 'how' we do it and how that affects ourselves and affects others.

*"Always be yourself, express yourself, have faith in yourself, do not go out and look for a successful personality and duplicate it."*

~ Bruce Lee

**How might we find our own personal dharma? Some suggestions are:**

- Spend time in practices which increase sattva guna so you can perceive more clearly.
- Practice 'deep' listening in a quiet, non-expectant state; dropping a sincere question into the silence if you feel it would be helpful and then be awake to signs that follow as an answer.
- Take note of your skills and abilities and develop your strengths; remembering that sometimes the skills you possess have been those that have been hard won over time.
- Consider what you are passionate about, what excites you, as the soul generally speaks the language of emotion.
- It can be helpful to notice if there were strong passions in early childhood where you were naturally drawn to particular activities.
- See if you feel a certain archetype speaks to you such as being a leader, a teacher, healer etc.
- Determine if there is something you can do to serve your wider community.

Can you think of any others?