

Discovering Your Dharma

What are you here to do? What is your job in life? The Sanskrit word *dharma* can be helpful in contemplating the deep calling of your soul.

Dharma doesn't have an exact English translation, but it can be paraphrased as "righteous living". Dharma is the way you are meant to live — in general as a human being, and also as an individual with a unique set of lessons to learn, experiences to have, and gifts to give. In a way, your dharma is also your mission in life.

When you have a sense of what your mission is, you make better choices about what to do and not do during your time in this world as you. When you live in accordance with your greater destiny, you are naturally guided to do what is right in both large and small situations.

All human beings share certain big-picture dharmas, such as to take care of this planet and one another, while discovering, expressing, and honoring the divine nature of life. Some spiritual sages say that the ultimate dharma is to live so that you go to Heaven or to follow practices that will bring spiritual enlightenment or liberation from this illusory world of limited experience (see Chapters 14 and 17).

Along with common group dharmas that should be followed by all human beings, each person also has his or her own individual set of dharmas. For example, someone may have the personal dharma of always being as honest as possible, regardless of the possible repercussions. Another person may feel deep inside that it is her responsibility to help when she sees someone who is in need, regardless of whether others would expect her to take responsibility in those circumstances.

Consider

Sometimes people find their dharma through challenges or tragedies. For example, many celebrities and others who have experienced certain illnesses come to sense that helping to find cures for these illnesses would fulfill their mission by helping to heal their loved ones, themselves, and the greater good of humankind. Their dedication to a good cause gives meaning to their suffering and helps remove the suffering of others, which is a great dharma for anyone to follow.