

DHARMA: A BEACON IN THE DARKNESS

Dharma is an important, multifaceted concept that seeks to explain each individual's place in the complex, chaotic holarchy we find ourselves in. While many ethical systems present a dogmatic prescription of what 'right action' is, and how it should be maintained, Dharma approaches morality with an openness that can only be found through the presentation of a dialectical system: one whose whole is best understood by two opposing forces.

In Dharma, these two poles are the subjective, individual application of action found in one's behavior from day to day, and the absolute, unchanging, cosmic nature of Dharma as a unifying principle. Dr. Elinor Wolfe's emphasis on the Sanskrit derivation of Dharma is very telling, as she explains that the word's root is 'dhri,' which means 'that which upholds.' A straightforward implementation of this linguistic perspective demonstrates that the connecting link between the individual and collective aspects of Dharma can be found in its essence as a notion based on action – in this case, the action of upholding.

The inherent presence of action, as found in many Vedic concepts, immediately situates Dharma as an ethical consideration, which paves the way for Dr. Wolfe's further exploration of its relationship to individual duty and virtue. Opening Dharma up to include the sense that its execution carries a maxim of personal involvement leads us to consider Swadharma, which translates, quite literally, to 'one's own duty.' Where the concept supersedes the prescriptive ethos of most political and religious tenets, for me, comes in its ability to simultaneously include the roles of both free will and determinism in its most basic definition.

Here, Dharma presents itself as the overarching law of Nature, however, the individual is given a choice to abide by it as they see fit, which turns its focus toward the individual's interior relationship with themselves, as best expressed through Maharishi's beautiful elucidation: "The first duty is to our Self. The first duty is to make use of the possession of this beautiful instrument that we have. Develop it fully. Make use of it fully. This is our first Dharma"

Dr. Wolfe further expands on Maharishi's work on systematizing Dharma through his presentation of a practical criteria for determining right action, in relation to Swadharma, which results in the formation of a unique combination of one's particular talents, one's individual passions, and the question of 'what does the world need?'

In this way, Dharma is not merely a philosophical consideration, but a guidepost for each of us to consider both the individual and collective effects of each action we take, and how this relates to our overall approach to living. As a personal application, Dharma glows like the luminescent beam of a lighthouse, casting even the faintest gleam on my Shadow in times when the inlet that leads back to shore is unclear. In these moments, I simply ask myself what I can do to better myself, such that I can continue to uphold the evolutionary force of nature seeking to heal and progress our world.