

# Dharma Upholds

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*Abstract:* “Dharma,” that which supports or holds, is an important and extremely useful concept, but there is no equivalent expression in Western languages that conveys its meaning or beauty. Dharma is a natural result of truth-love, goodness in action. It upholds the health and integrity of people and society. Awareness of what is dharmic expands with experience, individually and collectively. Laws and customs ought to reflect dharma, but often do not. People have a right to their bodies, minds, and the fruit of their labor, and depriving them of it by force or deceit is not dharmic. Dharmic trading is vital for the economic integrity of a society. Deception and failing to honor one’s pledges, including pledges to serve the public, is not dharmic. When desire and dharma lead in opposite directions, one has the opportunity for spiritual growth and building character. Individuals and communities may have very different dharma.

## The Meaning of “Dharma”

“Dharma” is a Sanskr̥t word meaning “that which supports or holds.” Dharma upholds what is true, virtuous, just, and lasting. It upholds what makes a society stable, productive and enduring. It upholds our inner sense of goodness, justice, life and life-giving-ness.

There is no equivalent term in Western languages.<sup>1</sup> “Dharma” is often translated as “right action” or “righteousness,” which can be misleading, and fail to convey its full meaning. “Right” and “righteous” are often used in a very judgmental and dogmatic way, especially by people who are very sure they know exactly **the** right thing for everybody to do, in any circumstance.

“Right” is the opposite of “wrong.” Translating “dharma” using the word “right” suggests that dharma can be understood as simply not doing wrong, or perhaps that it

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1 “Dharma” became “dhamma” in Pali.

is equivalent to obeying laws or commandments. Dharma, however, is individual, and is much more beautiful and wonderful.

Dharma refers to “doing the right thing.” It means choosing goodness even when “the right thing” involves some pain or loss. It means doing good for its own sake, not for the sake of gain, although it may result in gain. Dharma means doing good, but not to doing a socially proper or nominally charitable action to be proud or to gain favor with a deity or the public.<sup>2</sup> Sometimes it means fulfilling a family or social obligation.

“Adharma” means not-dharma, and in common usage conveys a sense of “wrong” or “bad.” But limiting the meaning of dharma and adharma to black-or-white, right **or** wrong, is unduly simplistic. It is not possible to determine what is dharmic by a list of “right” actions and “wrong” actions, or even by a list of actions with circumstances.

In any given situation, there is not one single action that is always “right” for all people, while all other actions are wrong. An action can be dharmic if one person does it and adharmic if someone else does it. An action can be dharmic in one way, and adharmic in another way. ***There is not only one right way.***

Most actions in themselves can be dharmic or adharmic. Killing, deceit, and stealing are usually adharmic, but there are rare situations where these actions are proper and dharmic. Violence is often adharmic, but sometimes it is dharmic. An adharmic action may not be “wrong,” and a dharmic action is not necessarily “right.”

As king Dharmaraja said, “Sometimes adharma looks like dharma; and dharma looks like adharma. Sometimes dharma wears its real nature of dharma and sometimes not. Only wise people through their wisdom perceive the real nature of dharma.”<sup>3</sup>

Tibetan yogi Milarepa voiced a similar idea thousands of years later: “If you find a certain practice increases your evil passions and tends to selfishness, abandon it, even though it may appear to be virtuous; and if any line of action tend to counteract the five evil passions, and to benefit sentient beings, know that to be true and holy dharma, and continue it even if it appears to be sinful.”<sup>4</sup>

Many actions that are adharmic are perfectly legal, and some are not even considered wrong. Many adharmic actions cannot be legislated or controlled by others, as they occur out of sight. Conversely, actions that are pure dharma are sometimes illegal, and occasionally are even considered wrong or bad.

Dharma is said to be Buddha’s eightfold path of the noble ones, which includes: right understanding, right intent, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. “Right intent” means intending to not cause harm or



2 In some places, people beg outside temples telling people, “Do dharma,” by which they mean to give them money. This is not the meaning of “dharma,” for giving money can be dharmic or not dharmic.

3 Vyasa, *Mahabharata, Book 5 Book of Effort (Udyoga Parva)*, 28.2.

4 *Tibet’s Great Yogi Milarepa: A Biography from the Tibetan*, W.Y. Evans-Wentz, ed., 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 261.

suffering. Buddhist doctrine considers “right livelihood” to be earning without coercion or violence; without slaughtering animals or raising animals for slaughter; honestly, without trickery or deceit; without causing suffering to sentient beings; and not manufacturing or trading in weapons, poisons, intoxicants, slavery, prostitution, child abuse, or human trafficking.

Dharma refers to action. It means acting at the appropriate time; it means refraining from acting at an inappropriate time; and sometimes it means refraining from acting. However, renunciation all action is not dharmic.<sup>5</sup>

Nature is dharmic by nature. Adharma applies only to creatures with the capacity to choose one course of action over another. Humans have great scope for choice, and thus great capacity for dharma and adharma, and combinations of both.

Dharma is inextricably linked with truth, and is, in fact, a product of it. Without truth, there can be no dharma. Any thought or action that is based on untruth is not dharma, no matter how good its intention, and whether or not the people involved know the truth.

Love, the awareness of unity, is truth.<sup>6</sup> Love and truth are inseparable. When referring to “love,” most people think of affection, desire, emotion, or all kinds of things that are not really love, so using the word “love” is often confounding rather than helpful. Love is truly an inherent aspect of dharma.

**Dharma is action, of body or mind.**

**Dharma is the natural fruit of truth-love.**

**Dharma is goodness in action.**

5 According to Kṛṣṇa, as stated in Vyasa, *Mahabharata*, Book 5 Book of Effort (*Udyoga Parva*), 29.8.

6 For a more detailed discussion, see *About Love*, Parts 1-2, [https://wisdom2joy.com/About\\_Love](https://wisdom2joy.com/About_Love).

## Dharma Supports Us All

Dharma itself is immaterial and does not change; however, people's awareness of what is dharmic and what is not does change, both individually and collectively. More experienced souls and cultures acquire fine-tuned distinctions and awareness of dharma, resulting from experience and attentiveness. Consequences of actions also bounce back more quickly to experienced souls than to inexperienced souls, who do not yet comprehend dharma and might not be able to bear them.

Today, it is considered immoral to own slaves, to pollute the environment, or to refuse to hire people because of their skin color—although not so long ago these practices were prevalent and even sanctioned. Thousands of years ago, charging or paying interest was absolutely forbidden, but today it is normal. For millennia, women were considered property of a man, but today this attitude is considered immoral in most cultures. What people **think** is moral at any given time is not the same as dharma.

***The laws and customs of a land and culture ought to reflect dharma.*** However, they don't necessarily do so. A law may be totally adharmic, in which case, following it is not dharmic; however, one might need to follow it in order to stay alive and out of jail. When in Rome, it is not necessarily dharmic to do what the Romans do.

As Frederick Bastiat wrote, "When law and morality contradict each other, the citizen has the cruel alternative of either losing his moral sense or losing his respect for the law."<sup>7</sup>



***Obeying laws or customs is not equivalent to dharma.***

Bastiat also wrote, "When plunder becomes a way of life for a group of men in a society ... they create for themselves a legal system that authorizes it and a moral code that glorifies it."<sup>8</sup>

***It is important to realize that current customs, laws, ethics, and general public opinion about morality do not necessarily reflect dharma, and do not necessarily even reflect the moral sense of the people, but rather reflect what the powerful want to do with impunity.***

Statesman Daniel Webster wrote, "The proper function of a government is to make it easy for the people to do good and difficult for them to do evil."<sup>9</sup> Clearly, governments have not been fulfilling this purpose for quite some time—if ever.

***Dharma upholds what is required for individuals and societies to thrive. It upholds truth, stability, and justice.***

7 *The Law* (1850), p. 8. <https://fee.org/media/14951/thelaw.pdf>.

8 *Economic Sophisms* 2<sup>nd</sup> Series (1848), Ch. 1 Physiology of Plunder.

9 *The Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster: Diplomatic Papers and Miscellaneous Letters*, (2006, Kessinger).

In the end, truth and dharma prevail. In the meantime, people who uphold dharma sometimes suffer greatly for its sake. Dharma does protect its protectors, but that doesn't mean that every dharmic action brings immediate pleasant consequences. If it did, people would act dharmically because of their immediate gain, not for its own sake. There would be no moral challenge, and souls would not grow spiritually. This adharmic period on Earth is a great boon for spiritual development! Eventually, however, those who act dharmically find themselves protected.



**Dharma supports and upholds  
health and integrity of  
body, mind, and community.**

**Dharma protects  
that by which it is protected.**

### **The Fruit of Labor**

People have a right to their own bodies and minds, and to the fruit of their own labor. They have a right to their own thoughts and decisions. They may not have a right or ability to implement their decisions, but they have a right to decide what they wish according to their own values.

No one owns the body or soul of another human being. Parents create the body of a child, and have rights and duties which diminish gradually as the soul gains ability to control the body, but parents do not own the child's body or the soul inside it. Neither do the state, monarch, or religious leader own people's bodies or souls. It is not dharmic to pledge a baby in the womb, or to sell a child into future marriage or service.



Controlling other people physically or mentally through economics, slavery, mind control, sexual force, subverting their will through magical means, or removing the soul by force, violates one of the most fundamental principles of human life and existence. Each of us has a right to the body and mind into which we are born. It was given to us by the Divine—not by other humans. Other humans do not have a right to take it away, except in individual or collective self-defense.

Causing harm or unnecessary suffering is normally adharmic. There are situations where doing some harm is necessary. One can always seek to do the minimum amount of harm and cause the minimum amount of suffering to everyone.



**Gain by one's own honest work is dharma. This right to property, the fruit of one's labor, is fundamental to our process of spiritual growth. People *must* have the right to their own work, to see its results, and to exchange it with others, in order to fulfill the promise and learning of a physical, three-dimensional existence.**

Most people don't comprehend how important this principle of dharma is, since it has been violated so seriously for so long, and, as Bastiat noted, moral codes and laws have been created that sanction these violations. People think that if a merchant cheats, it harms only the customers—but it actually harms the very fabric of society as well.

It is not dharmic to steal, to take what belongs to others—their life, their life energy (chi, prana, orgone, loosh), their health, or the fruit of their labor—by force, threat, extortion, trickery or deception. Cheating and exploitation are types of stealing. Using force or manipulation to control or to derive sexual pleasure without the full, unencumbered consent of the partner, or with a child, is also a type of stealing. This includes rape, molestation, prostitution and human trafficking.

When people do not own the fruit of their own labor, they stop producing. They stop making effort to do more or better. They stop learning. They lose motivation. This is natural. When people have full, or even nearly full, rights to the fruit of their own labor, they excel, they produce more and better—and they are enthusiastic and happier.

**For an enthusiastic, productive,  
happy and safe society,  
everyone must retain  
the Natural right  
to the fruit of their labor.**

### Exchanging and Giving

We usually want to exchange the fruit of our labor for something else: trade, commerce. Trade is beneficial. It encourages creativity and excellence. People learn and are inspired by what others have created.



Transporting products from one place to another involves labor, cost and risk, for which traders must be fairly compensated. In each case, a certain amount of profit is dharmic. Only the trader knows this value, because only the trader knows the labor and expense that was incurred. There is not a fixed percentage of profit that is dharmic, and above which is not dharmic.

There is a difference between trading with an honest profit, and exploitation or extortion. Throughout history, traders have often been greedy and charged as much as they could induce buyers to pay. This practice undermines the economic foundation of a people. It cannot be controlled effectively by laws or governments, nor can there be any fixed criteria, because conditions vary all over the map.

Dharmic exchange relies almost entirely on the integrity of individual traders. One cannot look to current customs or laws to determine what is dharmic and what is not, or what profit is dharmic and what is exploitation or extortion. It is the individual trader who must sense when he or she is crossing the line from just profit to exploitation. A guideline is to imagine oneself in the shoes of the other people involved, and ask how they would feel if they knew everything.

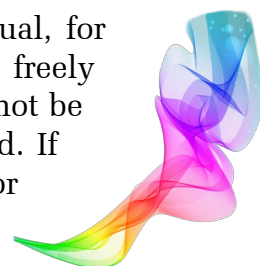


When someone has created something and made it available for free, it is not dharmic to sell it to other people. If one creates a greater work that includes free material, it is dharmic to charge for one's own work, as long as what one acquired for free is not the main product or attraction. The General Public License (GNU),<sup>10</sup> Creative Commons<sup>11</sup> and open-source license agreements espouse this principle.

A man who transmits healing energy from beyond has always refused to take money for the healing energy itself, as it does not come from him. He makes no claims and does not promise anything. He accepts transportation costs; he accepts a small royalty from videos in which he spends considerable time to assist viewers to be relaxed and receptive to Goodness; and he accepts donations. But he does not accept payment for his time transmitting the energy or for any healing that occurs.<sup>12</sup> This level of economic dharma is extremely rare in this day and age.

A woman who is naturally extremely psychic has helped countless people with her psychic abilities, and she too has never charged. She knows inwardly that charging would be adharmic. She accepts donations if they are offered, and derives income through other means.

It is not dharmic to charge for anything that is purely spiritual, for anything that is not one's own ability or work, or for anything was freely acquired. Spiritual energy or forces are beyond the human and cannot be measured or controlled, and cannot be dharmically commercialized. If someone has and controls an ability or source of information, he or she can rightfully charge for using it—and it is therefore a human power.



If one does charge for spiritual services, it degrades them, bringing the energy down instantly. The high vibration of spirituality disappears. The services may still be helpful, but that inexplicable, Divine energy evaporates when tied to a payment.

Numerous people with special healing or psychic abilities have charged for their services. Some have found that their powers decreased and some of them have resorted to cheating;<sup>13</sup> many simply lose touch with spirituality somehow, becoming “off” in their information or advice; and some of them have suffered greatly, especially at the end of their lives. It is usually not clear whether their suffering was directly related to financial matters, but a few of them have felt that it was.

People who advertise “spiritual” services for pay tread on slippery ground because what is truly spiritual cannot be guaranteed by a person. Payment is commerce, and what is spiritual does not fit into the box of commerce.<sup>14</sup>

10 <https://www.gnu.org/licenses/old-licenses/gpl-1.0.html>, <https://www.gnu.org/licenses/gpl-3.0.html>.

11 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/>.

12 Braco (Josip Grbavac) from Croatia, <https://www.braco.me>.

13 Such as Uri Geller, a psychic who used to bend spoons with his mind, but resorted to cheating later.

14 For a more detailed discussion, see *To Give or Not to Give*, Surprise 3 Giving and Gaining, p. 6-7 or video 3, [https://wisdom2joy.com/To\\_Give\\_or\\_Not\\_to\\_Give](https://wisdom2joy.com/To_Give_or_Not_to_Give).



It is normally dharmic to charge for expert advice; for private conversations, focusing on the client alone; for investigations or diagnostics; for procedures; for instruction or courses; or for items such as herbal preparations, remedies, appliances, or books. These can all help clients to reach their goals.

Techniques alone are not enough, however, because the will and soul, emotions, beliefs, habits, and past behavior of the client are also factors in how they pursue their goals, and whether they can even reach them. With human beings, we must always consider the whole person—body, mind, and soul.<sup>15</sup>

To be dharmic, people who do access spiritual energies and offer services for pay simply need to distinguish between their commercial services, for which they charge, and their access to spiritual forces, for which they do not charge. Their claims and rates can simply reflect the actual commercial services they deliver.

**Whenever we charge, we are engaging in commerce, even if what we are delivering is not material, and the dharma of commerce applies. We must deliver what we promised.**

**Whenever we charge for something, we are bound.**

Dharma in commerce means that in any contract, duties and benefits must be balanced, commensurate. ***Each party must have a duty and an appropriate benefit associated with that duty.*** If one party has no duties, that party is not entitled to any benefits, regardless of any document or law, signed or implied.

Learning not to steal—material, energy, or information—in a three-dimensional world is training ground for advanced realms where stealing is not allowed and does not occur. Here on Earth, one can eventually eliminate even the wish to steal anything from anyone. Spiritual growth and learning does not accrue by theft, deceit, or force of any kind.

Speculation and gambling are not necessarily adharmic, but neglecting one's duties and commitments is.

Interest in any amount is not dharmic. By design, it exploits anyone who does not receive interest, including the poor. At the same time, it increases the wealth of those who have enough savings to “earn” interest.<sup>16</sup> It automatically results in some people deriving gain without laboring or contributing to society, and harming those who labor by devaluing their compensation and what they own. ***Interest robs the poor to pay the wealthy.*** It is legally sanctioned, but it is not dharmic.

“Fractional banking,” wherein a bank loans out the same asset on paper ten times simultaneously, or thirty times, or thirty thousand times, is totally adharmic. This practice mercilessly plunders ***all*** people who use money. Worldwide, people suffer economically and don't realize why.

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15 For some relevant stories, see *The Good Doctor*, [https://wisdom2joy.com/The\\_Good\\_Doctor](https://wisdom2joy.com/The_Good_Doctor), and *Heal Thyself*, p. 10 or video 3, Find the Root, [https://wisdom2joy.com/Heal\\_Thyself](https://wisdom2joy.com/Heal_Thyself).

16 See *Money*, 3 Money in Practice, p. 7-8 or video 3, <https://wisdom2joy.com/Money>.

Banks use their depositors' money and assets to trade internationally during the night, for their own profit—which is parasitic and completely adharmic. The banking industry has been adharmic since its inception during the Crusades.<sup>17</sup> The entire financial industry, from banking institutions, to stock markets, to price-fixing of commodities, to trading of currencies and “futures,” and even big money-makers like athletics, is rigged and corrupt. Yet the **image** of bankers and banks is honorable, honest, trustworthy, dependable, and dharmic. Projecting this false image is also adharmic, but most people, unknowing, believe it.



Besides trading the fruit of our labor, we can choose to give it away, willingly, without any expectations or hope of getting anything in return. This is a pure gift, a pure sacrifice. It does not fall within the realm of commerce.

Pure gifts can be extremely beneficial. In fact, most of the universe operates with pure giving, not with commerce. Our life, our beautiful and bountiful Earth, stars and microbes, have all been gifted. If we stop to contemplate how much we have received without laboring in exchange, we gain a different perspective on commerce and on life.

Sometimes we wish to carry someone else through a difficult period, physically, emotionally, or economically, and sometimes someone else carries us through a difficult period. On the spiritual path, however, we cannot carry anyone else, and no one else can carry us. The spiritual path is individual and we can only progress by our own individual choices and actions. We can receive Divine Grace—and hopefully our subsequent actions are befitting of that Grace.

**The dharma of property, the fruit of labor, and of exchange, is vital to spiritual progress, both individually and collectively. Eventually one desires to gain only through one's own actions. Spiritual progress occurs only through one's own effort and dharma.**

<sup>17</sup> For a summary, see Douglas Gabriel, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LvYRrLVAI7A>, <https://truthbitsblog.files.wordpress.com/2019/04/venetian-takeover-of-british-banking.pdf>, and <https://aim4truth.org/2019/04/01/cat-report-33/>; Joseph Farrell <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pZ6qnoMnkP0>.

## Honesty

Speaking and writing what we honestly think is true is an essential aspect of dharma. Without the truth, we are bound to fail in any endeavor.<sup>18</sup> If someone deliberately tells us untruth, it sabotages us, and if we deliberately tell others untruth, it sabotages them. Lying is so commonplace all over the world—and people wonder why our societies are disintegrating. People seem to have no idea why it's so important to speak honestly. They don't stop to realize the effects of dishonesty, short-term and long-term.



Untruth is a poison. Whether it is spoken, written, or thought, untruth emits a discord. It clashes with the truth of the universe, and with the mechanisms of life, matter and energy. Untruth is painful, although most people are in too much chaos and discord already to notice the pain of a single incidence of untruth.



Emitting untruth is equivalent to excreting foul material into a public place. Harboring untruth retains a poison in our own field, with noxious energy emitted at any random time or place, leaving the poisonous seed intact. Making a mistake—unknowingly emitting untruth—is still discordant, but not as foul as consciously lying.

Dishonesty—all dishonesty—dirtyes our minds and subtle energy fields, until we are so mired in filth that we can't distinguish truth from untruth when they are right in front of us.

Untruth does not stand up on its own—it requires more untruth to prop it up. Anything founded on untruth will fall, and anything based on fraud is not valid. Disentangling and dismantling systems founded upon fraud or untruth is a monumental task, and an urgent one for humanity at this time in history.

Sincerity aligns us with truth. It keeps our “field”—our subtle bodies, our mind and mentality—clean and clear. This helps us to recognize truth more readily.



Many sincere people isolate themselves from much truth by associating only with people and information that are already familiar to them. They remain in a bubble of their own creation, disregarding anything outside it. The executives of American auto companies in the 1970s were aggressive men who wanted big, powerful cars, and couldn't imagine why anyone would want a small, lightweight car. They

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<sup>18</sup> For a detailed discussion, see Truth First, Part 1 Starting With Truth, p. 1-4 or video 1, [https://wisdom2joy.com/Truth\\_First](https://wisdom2joy.com/Truth_First).

decided not to make small cars, and their companies were economically devastated by the influx of small cars from overseas. They learned the hard way the importance of looking outside their bubble.

Only to prevent a much bigger adharma is it better to speak an untruth. If someone appears at the door with a weapon and asks, "Where's your mother? I want to kill her," it is much better to lie than to say, "Oh, she's right here!" In such a case, the consequences of untruth apply, and the consequences of saving a life also apply.

The principle of doing one adharma to prevent a bigger adharma is not to be misapplied, however. If someone just wants to avoid feeling embarrassed, or feeling anything, lying is not dharmic.

Manipulating people is usually not dharmic, unless it is done purely, without self-interest. Parents manipulate their children to do what is best for them. With adults, informing them honestly and respecting their right to their decisions is dharma.

Tricking people into doing something adharmic so that they will suffer the consequences, is not dharmic. Tricked people experience the results of their actions, and anyone who deliberately tricked them will experience both the results of their trickery and of the adharmic action they induced others to do.



Tricking someone into accepting a gift, procedure, or benefit, either with hidden strings or something corrupt or harmful, is similarly adharmic. The gift of the Trojan horse with soldiers inside won that battle, but giving or recommending treacherous gifts is adharmic and significantly impedes one's spiritual progress.

Dishonesty, insincerity, and pretense with an intent to deceive or manipulate, are not dharmic. Dishonesty is harmful long-term. If we deceive, we will one day be deceived, and suffer the wasted time and energy of going down paths that don't lead where we want to go. It's usually better to keep quiet than to deliberately deceive.

Most of the social suffering, disease and chaos today can be traced back to a fundamental untruth that was propounded, accepted, perpetrated, and acted upon again and again. Even much of our personal suffering can be traced back to untruth, and adharma. In order to heal our communities and our world, we must start with truth first.



**Dishonesty is ugly and repugnant  
compared to the exquisite beauty  
and profound wonder of  
our universe and our Source.**



### Pledges

Keeping our word is another essential aspect of dharma. In cultures of old, people who kept their oaths when it was difficult were respected and revered like saints were.

Any promise or commitment we make binds us to fulfill it. When we make a commitment, other people make their plans accordingly. If we fail to fulfill our commitment, they cannot proceed with their plans, and sometimes great harm can occur. It's important to give our word carefully.

It is also important that any commitment be made with full disclosure of all relevant information and ramifications. A child is not capable of understanding the full import and consequences of many pledges, which is why children do not have the lawful right to contract. A pledge is not valid if the person making the pledge is incapacitated, lacks relevant knowledge, or is deceived into making it.



When someone accepts a public appointment or takes an oath of public office, they are bound by dharma to serve the public and to fulfill the purpose of their office. One is no longer free as before. There are greater obligations, and one is rewarded for fulfilling them by the respect and gratitude of the people one serves honorably.



An old joke goes, “I’m from the government, and I’m here to help you.” It is unfortunate that public officials had become so adharmic that this became a joke.

Vows of secrecy are especially important to consider very carefully. In war, secrets are necessary, and secrets are justified when someone commits to playing a role in a possible war. Militaries are sometimes extremely vicious in enforcing secrecy, and people considering such positions are entitled to know the consequences in advance. Some militaries kill family members and friends of people who have taken oaths of secrecy, rather than killing the person bound by the oath. Many people who have taken oaths of secrecy resort to drinking and worse later in life because secrecy, especially about wrongdoings, is very difficult for human beings to bear.

Some organizations divulge secret information and require members to keep their vows of secrecy for life. Whether the information warrants such secrecy can be questioned, but taking a vow is a serious matter. Organizations may require members to pledge loyalty to whomever occupies its leadership position. Occupants of leadership positions change. How can one pledge loyalty to everyone who will occupy that position in the future? Should one pledge such loyalty?

Long ago, a king wanted to marry a beautiful woman, but she would not concede unless he promised that her sons would accede to the throne. The king had a son by a previous marriage, who excelled as a warrior and leader. To make his father happy, the prince took a vow of celibacy, for which he acquired the name “Bhishma,” the Terrible. He then took a second vow to support and uphold whomever sat on the throne. He was highly revered for keeping his word.

Circumstances led to a blind king on the throne, with his very adharmic son in control. They refused to act with honor or justice, and a great war ensued. Bhishma, one of the greatest warriors of the day, had two choices: honor his vow and fight for adharma, or break his vow and fight for dharma. He kept his vow and fought for adharma. On his deathbed of arrows, he realized that his vows were a factor leading to the great war which had caused enormous suffering.<sup>19</sup>



Bhishma took his vows with a good intent—to please his father. However, the vows were not dharmic—they pledged him to abandon his rightful duties to the kingdom, to lead, protect and take care of his people. In pledging to uphold whomever sat on the throne, he was putting his father’s desire above his dharma.

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19 Vyasa, *Mahabharata*, Book 13 Anusasana Parva.

It is important to keep one's word, but if a pledge was itself adharmic, or is causing harm, it can be better to break one's promise than to perpetrate greater adharma.

**Pledges of all kinds are best taken with serious and due consideration. Unless someone defrauded or deceived us, we are bound to keep our word.**

### Desire and Dharma



Life is full of desire. Every creature is moved by desire and seeks to fulfill it. Flowers turn toward the Sun and roots seek water and minerals. Animals roam for food, and humans cultivate and trade in distant lands. Elder trees care for the forests, and elder humans seek to impart their wisdom to youngsters. All forms of life seek to consume, to give, and to reproduce.

Desires are natural. What makes humans human is that we are in choice, or at least we can be in choice, about which desires to pursue, when and how, and which ones to forego.

Spiritual growth is evidenced by choosing dharma when there is a choice between desire and dharma, when they lead to different paths of action. Sometimes they are the same: desires can be dharmic, inspired by the soul, by wisdom, by the Divine. But sometimes dharma means forsaking a desire, either temporarily or permanently, and sometimes it means pursuing a desire in a more disciplined or measured way.



Whenever one has an addiction to a substance or activity, the addiction is more important than dharma or morality and one is inevitably adharmic at times.

When we feel a desire, we need to look inside ourselves and find its root. Sometimes the root is simply a need of the body, like hunger. Sometimes we just feel a need for sympathy or “moral support,” to be understood or heard, or respected.

Sometimes we just want something very strongly. Sometimes we are angry, jealous, or resentful and want to hurt someone, or see them hurt. Sometimes we might want to win or dominate.

We need to look at each desire to see if its root is:

- a physical or emotional need;
- a desire of the ego; or
- a desire of our soul.

How, when and if we pursue our desire depends on its origin. If it is a need of our body or personality, we pursue it with due consideration of others. If it is ego-based, we can either disregard it or pursue it with caution. If it is divine, soul-based, we can pursue it with enthusiasm!

It is essential that we make this analysis of each desire when we are on the spiritual path. The ego is very sneaky and deceptive. It is expert at masquerading as dharma and good intent. It is expert at formulating logical reasons for everything it wants. But underneath the ego is self-interest alone. Allowing it full rein leads us to eventual suffering, and leads our soul into never-never land.

Fulfilling a desire does not eliminate it. Desires usually arise again and again, often stronger, if they were satisfied the last time.

**We must be in control  
of our desires  
in order to follow dharma.**

## Individual Dharma and Social Dharma

Individuals within a community and the community itself have very different dharma—sometimes even opposite.



When an individual is harmed, he or she may not want to personally take vengeance, and it might not be wise to do so. However, valid social authorities have a duty to the entire community to support and protect the community itself, to enable the people to survive and thrive.<sup>20</sup> To this end, the public must establish customs and systems of justice and force that address the survival, safety, health and integrity of the community. These need to encourage people to do good and the community as a whole to prosper.



These customs need to take into consideration the norms of the people—their current comprehension, abilities, discipline, habits, practices, and beliefs. There is naturally a wide variety of these characteristics among people in a society. Customs need to reflect people's capabilities and also encourage everyone to progress toward goodness and greater civility.<sup>21</sup>

The dichotomy between the dharma of an individual and the dharma of a community has led to much confusion and to weakened societies. Some people think that forgiving is always good and appropriate, and that communities should also forgive people who have done harm, without enforcing any punishments. Individual people often experience great benefits when they forgive, but communities experience harm instead!

Some people imagine that it is good and moral to allow adharmas to thrive in society—in the name of “love,” “human rights,” religion, or not hurting people's feelings. Some people imagine that one wrong can be cured by another wrong. Despite the obvious illogic of supporting wrongdoing in society, many people have allowed their communities to become veritable nightmares. Some of them relocate, taking their damaging philosophies with them, only to destroy their new communities.

To obtain a good harvest, we must pull out weeds from our gardens. To create effective structures and relationships, we must pull out weeds of untruth from our thinking and planning. To live with justice and humane governance, we must pull out weeds of graft, bribery, plunder, predation and deceit from our lawmakers and rulers.

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20 For a more detailed discussion, see *Forgiveness and “Karma,”* [https://wisdom2joy.com/Forgiveness and Karma](https://wisdom2joy.com/Forgiveness_and_Karma).

21 This is why representative government sometimes works—when people choose their wisest and most dharmic to represent them.

**We must collectively weed out  
adharma from our societies to obtain  
a safe and supportive environment  
for everyone to live and grow.**

**For human society to survive,  
we must recognize that it is dharma  
that supports us all—individually,  
in communities, and as a people.**

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