



Finding Your Dharma as a Path to Yogic Healing Part 2

Yoga and Ayurveda can help bring your students to a balanced place from which they can apprehend their life mission and bring it into being.

by Timothy McCall, MD

In Part 1, we discussed the connection between not knowing your dharma, or failing to live your life in accordance with it, and ill health. In this column, we'll cover in more detail how to help your students figure out their life's purpose and bring that vision into reality.

Getting Balanced

One caveat in trying to help your students access their inner intuition about their dharma is that a state of imbalance, viewed from an Ayurvedic perspective (see Ayurveda and Yoga Therapy), can lead them to inaccurately assess what's good for them. Someone who is stressed-out and vata-deranged, for example, may be drawn to things that tend to put their vata further out of balance, whether that's the food they eat, the style of yoga they practice, or the work they do. Get yourself in balance, however, and choices that tend to keep you in balance, and which better reflect your true nature, become more attractive.

A basic understanding of Ayurveda can help yoga therapists design practices that can move their students toward greater balance. If it's vata that's out of whack, the practice might include Sun Salutations to burn off nervous energy, standing poses to increase grounding, and twists and forward bends to calm the nervous system, followed by a long Savasana (Corpse Pose). In addition to cultivating calmness via yoga practice, Ayurveda would suggest various lifestyle choices involving diet and other habits to foster balance. Imbalances in kapha or pitta would similarly call for specific yogic and lifestyle recommendations. If you don't have this expertise yourself, you may be able to refer your student to a colleague who does.

Dharma in the Real World

Keep in mind that at the present moment, your student may not have enough information or pertinent life experience to accurately ascertain their dharma.



Finding your dharma can be an ongoing process, and sometimes what's right at one phase of life is not appropriate at another. You often can't know what you're supposed to do until you try a few things. Especially if you're thinking about entering a field that requires years of study, it's advisable to talk to people who are already doing it, and perhaps arrange to spend some time with them on the job, to see if your ideas match reality. You'd hate to invest years and tens of thousands of dollars in education only to find out when you finally arrive that the field wasn't what you were looking for at all.

Once your students have a better idea of what they are here to do, it may still take a while to bring that vision into reality. If they've got family responsibilities or jobs that are paying the bills, it may not be prudent, ethical, or even possible to drop it all to follow their dreams. If so, the question becomes how they can, in a step-by-step fashion, start changing their lives to align them better with their vision. For someone who wants to be a painter, it might mean taking a night-school class or setting aside some time on the weekends to pursue art. At this stage the yogic tool of sankalpa, or intention, can prove useful.

A sankalpa is a promise you make to yourself about what you intend to do. It is positive and stated in the present tense, and it speaks of the reality you hope to bring into being. It might be as basic as, "I am living my life in accordance with my dharma," but the more specificity you can bring to it the better. For the woman who hopes to paint, it might be something like, "I am moving toward becoming a painter by taking an art class two nights per week." As time and circumstances change, you can guide your students to modify their sankalpas. Repeating this sankalpa regularly—saying it out loud a few times every day with feeling and even visualizing yourself living it—can help plant it more deeply in your subconscious, and, yoga would say, make it more likely to happen.

The Role of Instinct

As your students move more deeply into their yoga practices, they will learn with greater and greater facility to access—and trust—their gut instincts. While your mind can help formulate the proper questions and research possible avenues for your skills, figuring out what is right for you is ultimately not a matter of thinking and analysis. In fact, thinking too much can actually interfere with making the proper decision (think back to multiple choice exams!), as you are likely to weigh into the equation such factors as what seems practical, what's safer, or what other people expect of you.



If you have laid the foundation with your yoga practice, all you need to do is to ask yourself the question, then learn to go inside for the answer. What yoga is doing is lessening the interference, so that you can tune in and more accurately hear that inner wisdom. Better yet, yoga provides tools that can help your students bring their vision into reality. And doing that—or even just taking a step or two in that direction—will very likely benefit not just their health, but perhaps the world, too.



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