



Seeking the light

Is it possible to live your life's purpose, your dharma, in this world of distractions? A traditionalist and a modern yogi discuss what it means to live the yoga dharma.

Words Kylie Terraluna

"Being awake means being Light Beings in the now; living our dharma in the present moment." - Hillary Adrian Han

How can you live the yogic *dharma* within a culture conditioned for consumerism, where partying and drinking are the norm and distractions are everywhere? Are you living your dharma as part of your yoga practice?

Join the discussion with two yogis on the path, a traditionalist and a modern-day yogi, who shine light on what yoga dharma means and how to live it today.

Hillary Adrian Han

"We are just like our ancestors, as they too were seeking the light."

Hillary Adrian Han is a traditional yogi, completely devoted to practising a yogic lifestyle since the late 1960s. She lives in a bungalow at the edge of society by the sea in Thailand, remote yet available for those who seek her. Her message is to serve and inspire her students with the guidance they need to break away from the *samsara* (life cycle) of the system and be truly free.

She sees the yoga dharma as closely connected with nature, in tune with simple living for liberation. In line with this, Hillary runs Dharma Healing International (dharmahealingintl.com), a fasting program that emphasises letting go of old

karma to work towards enlightenment.

Her philosophy is steeped in decades of spiritual practice and, during the fasting course, she teaches students to "look from a portal of emptiness (*sunyata*) at self without judgement or attachments; unconditionally accepting where you are".

"To me, there is no greater dharma than fasting, or *upavasa*, up with God," she says. "The body, mind and spirit are given a tremendous opportunity to go back to the beginning of what it means to be truly pure and empty ... when we fast, we become present and grateful for the simple virtues of our humanness."

Out of the four *purusharthas* (Vedic aims of life), dharma is the most encompassing and most difficult to interpret. It has many meanings in Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. From her studies, which involved a 30-year project translating Thai Buddhist Dharmic texts to English, Hillary says, "It is evident that the word 'dharma' goes beyond our Western mind and conception, and there is no definitive translation.

"My definition of dharma is nature, the laws of nature, the duties that any entity or part of nature must abide by to follow those laws of nature, and the effects that occur through either following those duties according to the laws of nature, or not. In practising a life of yoga, we express our dharma in harmony with the

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flow of conscious awakening. Being close to nature supports a yogic life of dharma. When you are truly present, there is no time or space in the mind for fear; the presence of oneness is strengthened by a total immersion in the divine."

To live dharma today, Hillary teaches, "Depart from your linear perspective of time, money and energy; step out from the attachments that hold you back, that trap you and prevent a healthy lifestyle and the awareness of your higher divine self as being interconnected and one with all.

"To live a life of dharma, one must make it a priority above other less life-enhancing activities, above unhealthy relationships and addictive social behaviours. When you take one little step in the opposite direction, you are moving toward amazing rewards. Nature is who we are," assures Hillary. "Even the yoga *asanas* originally were representations of nature's creatures: the snake, locust, fish, camel etc. When we become one with Mother Nature, we learn who we are, we find our dharma; we reflect, internalise and can find peace."

Duncan Peak

"This is how the modern world has evolved. [Yoga philosophy] used to be so dry and now it seems a lot more theatrical."

Self-described modern yogi Duncan Peak is the owner of Power Living Australia Yoga, or PLAY (powerliving.com.au), a successful yoga brand with eight studios in operation, enjoying an annual turnover of AU\$10 million. Author of *The Modern Yogi*, Duncan feels closely connected to dharma and the path of service dharma brings. He speaks of his own transformation that surrendering to dharma has offered.

Dharma, as Duncan describes it, is "your spiritual life purpose; it is living moralistically, in line with the spiritual law so that everything you do is from your dharma". Years ago, when he

was medically discharged from the army, Duncan refocused on business management. "The [yoga] teaching part was such a big accident," he recalls. "I've always been a strong leader and it wasn't a hard skill to start teaching ... I can see it was my dharma, what I was meant to do; I had to accept it."

Up until that point, Duncan's life had been influenced by the army. He'd grown up with a father who was also a military man so, when Duncan turned to yoga, it took courage and commitment. "For a male like me with tattoos, it was a process because I had to let go of a lot of out-of-balance but comforting masculinity — and it wasn't cool to do yoga for a big masculine guy in 2004. It was an uphill battle; I was trying to convince a lot of people that it was a cool thing to get into."

Duncan says it has been his purpose to serve the yoga industry by setting the example of establishing studios and letting contemporary *vinyasa* (flowing) yoga evolve. Now it's done. "I have completed that karmic phase in my life and I now know there is something greater," he says. "People who become successful have a responsibility to be generous and do some good with their money, to work towards being more self aware, heal the world and give as much love to children as they can."

According to Duncan, a Power Living one-hour yoga class is "a physical workout that equates to tone and beauty and spiritual presence that brings a transformation. We don't go into the deep spiritual work; we are more about being present and mindful, rather than the transcendence. We get people clear on their mental chatter and the constant reactivity, and to question their thoughts. This provides insight to look at life in a different way.

"We encourage people to have faith that everything is perfectly as it's meant to be right now for you to be at peace.

live your dharma

For any yogi who wants to evolve, you need to know you are totally in charge of your inner state at all times.”

Living the yoga dharma

If you seek to live your yoga dharma, Hillary shares 10 steps to help you on the path:

- Slow down, place the mind with each step in life, bringing a mindful presence throughout each day.
- Give up toxic substances (meat, alcohol, coffee, processed carbohydrates, addictive pharmaceutical and recreational drugs). Cleanse old karmic attachments stuck in the body, emotions, relationships and attitudes.
- Introduce healthy, organic, plant-based raw foods as your main diet. Incorporate proper food combining, eat small meals and practise mindfulness when buying, preparing and eating food.
- During daily meditation, before walking away from the cushion, affirm being a channel of light, focusing on oneness, God consciousness, universal peace, emptiness and equanimity.
- Commune with nature whenever you can, letting go of the material world of gadgets, work and agendas.
- Centre yourself in a yoga practice in which you unconditionally accept where you are and who you are, and have patience with your growing ability to master the asanas as best you can. Be open and encouraged from within, and from those who you respect, to help you transform various aspects of your life that don't honour a pure yogic dharma lifestyle and connection to the divine.
- Engage in activities that provide you with an opportunity to forgive, where forgiveness allows the other person and thus yourself to be free. Find ways to express your compassion, charity, love and kindness to others (even enemies) without conditions and expectations.
- Follow the eightfold path: right



intention, right direction, right speech, right action, right effort, right livelihood, right mindfulness and right meditation.

- Be grateful for your life, even if you are suffering, as being grateful is likely to reveal the cause of your suffering and the appropriate path to alleviate it.
- Choose a profession that you feel happy with and where you feel grateful for all compensation. Meditate on seeing that the money — and all material abundance you receive — is divine substance, and that it is your dharma and karmic yoga to express compassion by channelling that abundance forward toward a venture worthy of your love to serve.

In addition, Hillary says, “Yogis need to grasp a depth of presence that encompasses as many dimensions and perspectives of consciousness as one is capable of incorporating into that moment. Being a yogi means living in union with nature and the divine universe.”

Dharma is in your nature and the righteous duties you are required to perform in this life to abide by cosmic law. To live the yoga dharma is to awaken to those righteous duties — your spirit's

mission — and act on them. To know the cosmic laws and grasp your unique dharma, settle consciousness through yoga practice, listen and live in harmony with the intuition found in being one with the natural elements and the whole universe. Slow down, purify, seek the light, be one with peace.

Does the notion of dharma fit with the modern lifestyle? Duncan suggests being real about modern-day pressures, disciplined and honest about the impact your choices will have, and then making your own decisions. These decisions, he says, are made in accordance with your commitment to spiritual progression at that time in your life.

Hillary asserts it is your right as a human being to be healthy and live your dharma. “To be liberated, to awaken our ‘immune intelligence’, to become enlightened beings, we are required to take excellent care and be attentive to everything in our life,” she says. As for her own purpose, Hillary says, “My goal in life is to be a pillar of divine light and a rock or a wave as often as I can. This has become a privilege that I am immensely grateful for.” ☯