



Discover Your Purpose

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How often do you ask yourself, “What is my purpose or my life’s plan? How can I discover and manifest what is most important to me?” When providing Vedic astrology consultations, I am often asked these questions. My answer is, “Let’s take a look at what your birth chart reveals about your deeper self and inborn tendencies, as well as the path you’re traveling, known in Sanskrit as ‘swadharma’.”

Swadharma is a specific form of dharma, and includes your intrinsic nature and authentic attributes, inclinations, and potentials. Uncovering swadharma reveals what affirms you deep within, and your purpose unfolds through this affirmation. This discovery becomes a foundation for leading a purposeful and fulfilling life, and for understanding your experience of the roles you take on.

Fulfilling Roles and Swadharma

Think of all the roles you (might) fulfill during the course of your lifetime. For example, your roles could include son or daughter, sibling, cousin, aunt or uncle, friend, lover, partner/spouse, parent, and grandparent—as well as roles such as student, business person, homemaker, professional, skilled laborer, leader, or artisan. Now ask yourself, “Are any of these outer roles I am doing fulfilling?”

Performing your roles well is important, and even crucial for yourself and for family and society, but may not be fulfilling. Swadharma is a key to transforming rote role performance into fulfilling experiences. You experience a meaningful and purposeful life when the actions you take to fulfill a role express your deeper interests and talents.

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Dharma and the Mystery of Life

Appropriately performing your roles is one form of dharma (known as varna or social dharma). Manifesting your intrinsic nature and authentic attributes, inclinations, and potentials is another (swadharma). But what is the essence of dharma? According to the ancient Vedic visionaries, dharma is an inherent quality of the mystery we call “life”, and is that which upholds the orderly relatedness of all that is. Throughout the ages, people have given this mystery many names, including Spirit, God, Self, and the One. In addition to dharma, other intrinsic attributes of this mystery include existence or being, consciousness, joy, and truth.

Discovering the Mystery of Swadharma

At our core, each of us is an expression of the One. Your essence is this immeasurable mystery. Because you are an expression of the One, the foundation of your actions is dharma. Each of us has duties to perform and purposes to fulfill in a variety of roles in this mysterious upholding of which we are all an intrinsic part. Manifesting your inborn uniqueness through actions is swadharma.

Deep within, there exists a felt-sense of being, your unique connectedness with “something more”, with the flow of life itself. How can you uncover and develop your intrinsic nature and authentic attributes, inclinations and potentials?

If swadharma is new to you, then it may be helpful to investigate questions such as, “Do I feel connected with something more? Do I have a sense of my authentic attributes and potentials?” If your answer is no, then ask yourself, “Am I curious to learn more about swadharma?” Contemplate the question, “What does swadharma mean to me?” Consider forming an intention: I am going to discover what feels important for me to uphold in my life.

If you do have a sense of your swadharma, are you expressing this in a fashion that is supportive and upholding of yourself and others you are connected with? Are you aware of swadharma changing its expression through new interests and activities, or through evolving or new relationships?

Try This One-Week Experiment

Here is a one-week method of self-exploration that can help you uncover swadharma. The first step is to keep a log of your daily activities—doing chores, preparing meals, playing, doing a hobby, working, spending time with family and friends, traveling, meditating, and so on. After you finish each activity, set aside one minute for silence and then reflect on these three aspects of your experience:

- 1 What am I thinking about what I just did?
- 2 What feelings or emotions am I aware of?
- 3 What bodily sensations am I experiencing?

In your activity log, jot down your observations and reflections about the activity. After a week of practicing this method, take time to review your list of activities and experiences. Trust and learn from the wisdom of your mind-body responses. Then reflect on, and evaluate what you review, and see what emerges.

Which activities generated meaningful and interesting experiences, and which ones didn't? Did any reactions surprise you? What, if anything, did you learn about your interests and abilities? Did you think of other activities not on your list that you might want to explore? If your answer is yes, then consider investigating and doing them.

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The Dynamism of Swadharma and Obstacles

Although the foundation of our actions is dharma, this does not mean we always maintain a constant solid footing. Probably all of us at different times, save a special few, find ourselves ignorant of, or out of sync with swadharma. Also, discovering and living swadharma is not a one-time, static event. It is a dynamic unfolding that can change as your life develops from birth through death. Swadharma requires recognition, nurturing, patience, dedication, understanding, resiliency, hardiness, risk-taking, and courage. It does not include indulgence or immature selfishness.

At various times, it is essential to identify and expand your awareness of what is getting in your way of recognizing and manifesting swadharma. Practical obstacles take many forms. You might find it useful to review your list of activities, experiences, and reflections. See if you identify any obstacles. Here are three examples:

- Perhaps you were stressed by someone or something, and reacted in a habitually negative way that stopped you from saying what you had decided needed to be said during an important conversation.
- A strong attachment might have kept you from letting go of a familiar experience even though you wanted to do something new.
- Fear of someone or of an experience stopped you from taking action the way you felt you needed to.

From a spiritual perspective, anything that keeps you 'in the dark' and ignorant of your essential nature cloaks swadharma, and is therefore an obstacle. Form an intention to be more conscious, especially of negative habits, and of overly strong likes and dislikes, as well as their effects. Any experience is useful that provides you with greater clarity about your practical obstacles and how they are affecting you in daily life. The more you become aware of the obstacles and their effects, the more you can readily manifest swadharma.

But there is no perfection, and no failure. Remember, swadharma is your intrinsic nature, which is a unique expression of the One. Your deeper self seeks to express itself in daily life. A key is earnest effort. Another key is living an intention to be conscious at your own pace and in your unique way. Be compassionate and gentle with yourself.

In the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna informs us that perfection is not a standard to use when attempting to live in alignment with swadharma. Krishna tells Arjuna:

“Even the wise man acts in accordance with his inner nature. All beings follow their nature. What good can repression do? . . . It is better to do your own duty badly than to perfectly do another’s; you are safe from harm when you do what you should be doing . . . No one should relinquish his duty, even though it is flawed; all actions are enveloped by flaws as fire is enveloped by smoke.[i]

Mixing metaphors from fire and smoke to rock, trying to live one’s swadharma can be likened to a sculptor chipping away at a block of stone. The artist may have a felt-sense of the outcome while continually trying to manifest her vision by smoothing the rough edges to uncover the essence of the artistic vision. And so it is with each of us. If you have a felt-sense of swadharma, then you may envision a more refined and mature authentic core self; and you commit to smoothing out whatever rough edges you encounter in yourself. The result is being more in alignment with your essence, which is a unique expression of the One.

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Swadharma and Vedic Astrology

Your birth chart reveals your intrinsic nature and authentic attributes, inclinations and potentials, as well as patterns of obstruction. During a consultation, a Vedic astrologer can discuss how these obstructive patterns are affecting you and suggest how to skillfully work with them, as well as what you can do to enhance manifesting swadharma.

One unique feature of Vedic astrology is a dynamic component. One planet takes on a heightened significance in your life at a specific time, and then another does the same, each for a set number of years. Vedic astrologers integrate the meanings indicated by this dynamic factor into the understanding of your birth chart and life.

During a recent consult, a client asked me to share what I saw about his current life. I could see that he had recently begun a new dynamic planetary phase. Based on the meanings of this planet and its placement in the birth chart, I understood that new elements of swadharma were surfacing, indicating a major shift in interests and activities. The new focus involved energy healing, especially of people suffering the effects of trauma.

The change struck me as dramatic. My client was employed in program development. I wondered if there were strong indicators of obstacles that might keep him from “going with the flow”. Maybe he was understandably attached to his decades-long career, or unduly afraid about working as a sole-proprietor in an alternative discipline. I concluded from my astrological assessment that he was strong enough to consider embracing this change. Nonetheless, I softly broached what I saw.

The more I described, the more animated my client became, although he had not yet shared the following details. After I finished my description, he said that he began doing healing energy work over the past year with individuals and small groups of people. He said, “I’ve been interested in healing for a long time, but I never thought I would make it my work. And then it just started happening! I’m helping people this way for some hours each week . . . I’m not sure how to make this work.”

My client and I discussed at length his situation and the possibilities. We agreed that it would be best for him to continue in his current employment, but see if he could work fewer hours. At the same time, he would increase the number of healing consultations he was providing. In this way, he would try to create as smooth a transition as possible.

My client already felt drawn to his new endeavor. The astrological clarification and validation contributed to his confidence and commitment, and helped him solidify an intention to build a viable transition to embody his newly surfacing swadharma.

It seems as if the mystery of life sets up situations that provide us with difficult experiences to ponder, and decisions to make. It’s like having our rough edges smoothed out by the master sculptor! Vedic astrology provides tools to see deeper into this mysterious sculpting. Ultimately, it is your consciousness that can shine a bright light on these creative dilemmas and guide you in your decision-making. While contemplating that you are a unique expression of the One, you can use any meaningful circumstance — relationships, health and wellness, education, work, meditation — to refocus your attention on what is most important, to mindfully and compassionately recognize negative habits, as well as entrenched likes and dislikes, and choose actions, as best you can, that uphold and express your intrinsic nature and authentic attributes, inclinations, and potentials.

[i] Bhagavad Gita, Stephen Mitchell, Translator, Three Rivers Press, New York, 2000, p. 68, p. 191.

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