



New Year's Reflection + Dharma Alignment Exercise

A NEW YEAR'S RITUAL:

Ever since I was young, I have always loved ringing in the New Year. It has always been a special and potent time for reflecting on my past and envisioning my future. As a kid, I always enjoyed the ritual of writing New Year's resolutions. As a yogi, this ritual has morphed into what I call a **dharma alignment exercise**.

About DHARMA:

The word *dharma* comes from Sanskrit, and it refers to your unique purpose and passion in life. **The Dharma Alignment Exercise** is an opportunity to get clear on who I am, who I am becoming, what I stand for, and where I want to put my time and energy. I created this exercise as an opportunity for me to reflect on the essential nature of my being, a way of owning who I am and who I have become, a means of acknowledging my gifts and challenges, and a way to align to these as I take aim for the New Year. The understanding is that I am not the same as I was twelve months ago. Thank God! Hopefully I have evolved. That is the point! Hopefully I have learned and grown from the past year and have acquired new gifts and skills to take with me into the New Year.

You see, dharma is dynamic. I am and you are in a state of evolution. We are works in progress. Even as I still feel myself to be the same person that I have always been, I have been growing and changing during the last year, and my identity has shifted some. My desire is to be in a co-creative relationship with the Universe. I have come to strongly believe that the Universe has my back and is conspiring for my evolution, and the best thing I can do for myself and for the planet is to cooperate with this and figure out who I am and live this on purpose.

If this resonates with you, then I invite you to join me in this exercise.

“Don't ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive, and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive.” – Howard Thurman

This is my all-time favorite dharma quote, and it is really the motto that my family lives by. As a lover of culture and travel, a life-long spiritual seeker and a wellness enthusiast, I have been following what makes me come alive all of my life. This has led me many places from my birthplace in Utah. I have traveled and lived in South America. I have lived up and down the Pacific coast of the United States. I began a career in education, then stumbled onto the exquisite and winding path of yoga and meditation, and then became captivated and healed through the life changing habits of Ayurveda. Some of **my identities or names I call myself** are: student, teacher, yogi, health coach, mother, and spouse. All of these reflect my dharma and yet my dharma is more nuanced than this.

What do you call yourself? What are your identities?

To own your dharma, you must know yourself deeply and discern the essential nature of your being. Dharma is the main topic of the Bhagavad Gita, perhaps the most famous yogic text of all times. In this text, Arjuna, the warrior is faced with an existential crisis. His story takes place on the battlefield, a metaphor for navigating life and its challenges. His task is to figure out who he is and to take action from that place. Krishna, the Divine in disguise has his back and is his mentor. I'm a huge fan of yogi-scholar and author Stephen Cope, who has an excellent book on the subject of the Bhagavad Gita and dharma called [The Great Work of Your Life](#).

Here are a few of the top lesson I have learned from Stephen Cope's book, [The Great Work of Your Life](#).

- 1. Look to your dharma.** *“Discern, name and embrace your dharma.”*
 - **Trust in the gift.** Trust in the gift of who you are. *“You cannot be anyone you want to be... Actually, you can only expect a fulfilling life if you dedicate yourself to finding out who you are.”*
 - **Think of the small as large.** *“We are not called to everything. We are just called to what are called to... we cannot achieve greatness unless we lose interest in being great.. It is therefore a very good thing to be little, which is to say, to be ourselves.”*
 - **Listen for the call of the Times.** *“Dharma is born mysteriously out of the intersection between the Gift and the Times.”*
- 2. Do it full out.**

- **Find out who you are, and do it on purpose.** *“Knowing your dharma, do it with every fiber of your being. Bring everything you've got to it. Commit yourself utterly.”*
 - **Unify.** *“Systematically organize your life's energy around your calling.”*
 - **Practice deliberately.** *“A life of dharma is exactly like a great yoga posture. Everything must be aligned around the spine. The dharma is a strict taskmaster.”*
- 3. Let go of the Fruits.** *“Success and failure in the eyes of the world are not your concern...”*
- **When difficulties arise, see them as your dharma.** *“What appear to be difficulties are really invitations.”*
 - **Turn wounds and challenges into light.** *“We work out our dharma on the field of real life. On the field of relationships. Of work. Of effort. Of hobbies. Of Callings. Dharma calls us not to just any old battlefield, to the battlefield where we will suffer most fruitfully.”*
- 4. Turn it over to the Divine/ Co-create with the Universe.**
- *“All true vocation arises in the stream of love that flows between the individual soul and the divine soul. All true dharma is a movement of the soul back to its Ground.”*
 - *“Your dharma is your way of staying connected to your True Nature. It is the particular way in which you can devote your life to the welfare of all beings.”*

Your dharma comes from the great mystery that is everything including you. The universe calls upon you, your gifts and your aligned action for these times.

Ultimately dharma comes down to choices. **“What will you do with your one wild and precious life”** poet Mary Oliver asks? In the classic definition of yoga, to yoke, we might ask, “what do you choose to yoke yourself to?”

To this end, I have created the following exercise to reflect on 2018 and plan for 2019.

BIG LISTENING:

Dharma work requires what I call BIG LISTENING. This is your capacity to ask yourself and listen for the answers to the following questions from deep inside yourself. I encourage you to answer these questions not just from your head, but from your whole body. BIG LISTENING requires a relaxed state of mind, a receptivity, and a willingness to examine the contents of yourself fully.

To begin, pause, soften and breathe. As you exhale, get heavier and feel the earth beneath you. As you inhale, bring the energy from the earth up through the central channel of your body. Use your breath to clarify this channel so that you can get clear on where you are and where you are headed.

In this exercise, you will reflect deeply at what has made you come alive this past year and what is making you come alive now. In order to clearly see your path ahead, you first have to own your growth, changes, challenges and successes of the past twelve months. So, please grab a pen and we'll begin.

REFLECT ON 2018. Here are the questions:

What made you come alive in 2018?

What did you **love doing** and **learning**?

What did you **embrace**?

What were the **high points** of the year?

What were your **challenges**?

What did you **let go of**?

What did you **grab on to**?

What **changed** for you?

What did you **discover**?

What were you most **grateful for**?

What were you most **afraid of**?

What did you do that was **courageous**?

What **surprised** you?

What will you **remember** most about this year?

What did you make come alive in 2018? Name at least 5 ACCOMPLISHMENTS of 2018.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

What **skills** made these accomplishments possible?

How did you **celebrate** or **acknowledge** your accomplishments? If you didn't do this, jot down a time and way you can own these accomplishments in the near future.

What was hard for you in 2018? Name 3 CHALLENGES you experienced.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

How did you **handle** these challenges?

What **skills, tools** or **people** helped you navigate these challenges?

What did you learn this year? Name 3 LESSONS from 2018.

- 1.
- 2.

3.

What were the GIFTS of 2018? Name 3 GIFTS.

1.

2.

3.

In what ways have you grown, become stronger, and evolved this year?

Is there anything else you want to remember or remark upon about 2018?

CLARIFY FOR 2019. Get clear on where you are and where you want to be.

As I said before, dharma is dynamic. There was something that was stirring in you on the first of January last year, and now, a year later, there is probably something different that is stirring in you. You still feel like yourself, but you are evolving and this year is going to be different. So, take a moment and feel what is stirring in you now. Close your eyes. Pause, soften and breathe. Notice what is coming forth. Then, answer these questions:

What is **making you come alive** at this time?

What are you **curious** about?

What do you **desire**?

Who are you **becoming** in this next phase of your life? Who do you **want to become**?

What does this **becoming feel** like? Is there a **word** that fits how you want to **feel** on the inside and outside this year? Drop this word into your mind-body awareness and embody this quality or value. Make it **operative** in your mind and physiology. **Write this word down.**

What are your unique **gifts, talents and strengths**?

How do your gifts and talents **intersect with the Times**? Where are your gifts and talents needed, valued, or appreciated right now?

What are your **challenges**?

What are you **afraid** of?

What **skills and abilities** will you need to work with your challenges and to activate your purpose and passion?

What are some of the **big or little things** you wish for in the New Year?

What will it take to **achieve** this or to make these happen?

What should you **give up** in the New Year to make your life more harmonious and vital?

Where are you in **in balance**? (Or, what is going well that you wish to keep?)

Where are you **out of balance**? (Or, what do you need to look examine and change?)

What do you want to say "**No**" to this year?

What do you want to say "**Yes**" to this year?

2019 ACTION PLAN.

Examine your dharma with regards to the following areas:

BE A LIFELONG LEARNER. Name something you want to study, investigate or learn in 2019..

AWAKEN YOUR CREATIVITY + IMAGINATION. Name one or two ways you want to be more creative in 2018.

GET HEALTHIER.. Name a few ways you want to up-level your physical health this year.

BE YOUR OWN BEST CARE-GIVER. List some ways you can nurture yourself better this year.

HONOR YOUR CORE RELATIONSHIPS. Name a few ways you can upgrade your relationships with those who are most important to you.

ENGAGE IN YOUR COMMUNITY. Is there a way in which you want to engage more deeply with your community.

NURTURE YOUR HOME ENVIRONMENT. List some ways in which you can nurture or up-level your home environment so that it is a place that supports your well-being and evolution.

BE A TIME WARRIOR. Name 3 ways you can use your time more wisely to achieve your goals this year?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

TAKE RISKS. You'll only evolve if you take risks. Name 3 things you can this year do that may be uncomfortable but will be beneficial catalysts for your growth and development.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

LOVE NATURE. List 3 ways in which you can more deeply enjoy and align to the natural world.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

BE SOULFUL. List 3 ways you can enjoy connecting to Spirit/Source, that part of you that contains the whole universe and influences and informs every arena of your life.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

NAME YOUR CHEER LEADERS. Name 3 people who you can count on to support your growth and evolution. Share these responses with them and actively ask for their support!

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

BE ACCOUNTABLE. How will you be accountable for making these changes happen this year? What habits will you cultivate to make your dreams come true?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Envision this! Close your eyes and consciously drop these intentions into your body-mind. In one year's time, where do you want to see yourself? What do you want to be operative?

This time next year, I will **feel...**

This time next year, I will **know ...**

This time next year, I will **have done ..**

This time next year, I **will be...**

Now, come back to dharma. Make sure that your ACTION PLAN is aligned to YOU! Remember, you can't be everything. You can only be who you are! You can only be uniquely you! A few last words from Stephen Cope...

"I have to believe that dharma gives us the one thing that we need to be fully human. Each of us must have one domain, this one place that is uniquely ours, is our work in the world.. the axis mundi, the in-movable spot – the one place where we really have the opportunity to wake up."

"See the world as yourself. You only have to love your little corner of the world, but you have to do it intentionally. And full out. And you have to get yourself out of the way. Then you can care for all things."

"Do your daily duty, and let the rest go. Poke away systematically at your little calling. Tend the garden a little bit every day."

