

RANJANA YOGA CLASS

Karma and Dharma

In Yoga: A Beginner's Guide

What karma, dharma and karma yoga mean,
and how to apply them in daily life

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Contents

#	Section
1	What karma and dharma is
2	Before you begin: safety first
3	Plain-word definitions
4	Karma yoga in everyday life
5	Your four-week plan
6	Choosing a class or teacher
7	Practising at home
8	Honest expectations
9	Common mistakes and fixes
10	Questions people ask
11	A pre-session checklist
12	Your first week, day by day
13	Glossary
14	Practice log

1. What karma and dharma is

In Indian thought, karma means action and its results. Dharma means duty, right conduct or the principle that sustains life. In yoga, karma yoga is the practice of acting with care and without clinging to outcomes.

These words are often used loosely in everyday English, as in "good karma". The traditions use them in more careful ways, and different traditions explain them differently.

The short answer

Karma is action and its consequences, dharma is right conduct, and karma yoga is doing your duty with full attention and without being driven by reward. It is a practice of ethics and attitude.

2. Before you begin: safety first

General education only. Check with your doctor first if you are pregnant, have high blood pressure, a heart, lung, joint or spine condition, osteoporosis, an eye condition such as glaucoma, or have had recent surgery or injury.

Stop and rest if you feel:

- sharp, pinching or burning pain (a mild stretch is fine, pain is a stop sign);
- dizziness, nausea or breathlessness;
- numbness or tingling, or pressure in the head or neck.

This is a reading and reflection guide, not a medical guide. If you try any practice you read about, do it gently, and talk to your doctor first if you have a health condition, are pregnant, or live with anxiety, depression or trauma.

3. Plain-word definitions

Term	Meaning
Karma	Action, and the idea that actions have results.
Dharma	Duty, right conduct, or what is fitting for a situation.
Karma yoga	Acting with attention and without attachment to results.
Seva	Selfless service.

4. Karma yoga in everyday life

Situation	A karma yoga approach
Work	Do the task well, then let go of anxiety about praise.
Family	Help without keeping score.
Community	Offer time or skill without expecting a return.
Setbacks	Do what you can, and accept what you cannot control.

Karma yoga is not an excuse to accept unfair treatment. Rights and boundaries matter too.

5. Your four-week plan

Week	Focus	Length	What to notice
1	Notice one action you did today with full attention	5 min	How did it feel?
2	Do one small helpful act with no reward	10 min	What did you notice?
3	Reflect on one duty you are avoiding	10 min	What would doing it well look like?
4	Repeat for a week	10 min	Keep a few notes.

6. Choosing a class or teacher

Some centres offer service projects as karma yoga. Check that volunteering is real choice, with no pressure or unpaid work disguised as spiritual practice.

- Ask which translation or commentary the teacher uses.
- Notice whether ideas are presented as tradition or as proven fact.
- If a teacher dismisses your questions or health needs, find another class.

7. Practising at home

You do not need a mat. Karma yoga is practised in ordinary tasks, such as cooking, cleaning, working or helping a neighbour.

8. Honest expectations

Karma is not a way to explain illness or misfortune. Ideas that blame people for their own suffering are harmful and not supported. If you are struggling, seek support from a doctor or counsellor.

9. Common mistakes and fixes

Mistake	Fix
Using karma to blame others	It is a tool for reflecting on your own actions.
Treating duty as endless self-sacrifice	Care for yourself too.
Expecting rewards	The point is acting well.
Mixing the words up	Karma is action. Dharma is duty.
Ignoring context	Different traditions explain these terms differently.

10. Questions people ask

Is karma the same as fate?

Not necessarily. Many readings stress that present action matters.

What does dharma mean?

Right conduct, duty or principle. The meaning depends on context.

Is karma yoga a religion?

It is a practice of attitude found in a religious text and used by people of many beliefs.

Can I practise karma yoga without any belief?

Yes, as a practice of attentive, unselfish action.

11. A pre-session checklist

- Have I eaten lightly, at least two hours ago, and had some water?
- Is my space clear, warm and free from interruptions?
- Do I know what I will practise, and how long I have?
- Is there anything in my body today (pain, tiredness, illness) that means I should do less?
- Do I know my stop signs: sharp pain, dizziness, breathlessness?

Running through these five questions takes less than a minute and prevents most beginner problems.

12. Your first week, day by day

Day	Suggestion
1	Read this guide. Try just the warm-up and the final rest.
2	Rest, or a five-minute walk.
3	Repeat day 1 and add one new pose or step.
4	Rest.
5	Practise a short version. Notice how you feel afterwards.
6	Write a few lines in the practice log.
7	Rest. Plan next week from what you noticed.

Three short sessions a week are a good start. Regular, gentle practice builds confidence, and rest days let the body adapt.

13. Glossary

Term	Plain meaning
Karma	Action and its results.
Dharma	Duty or right conduct.
Seva	Selfless service.
Nishkama karma	Action without attachment to results.

Reminder

This guide is general education and not medical advice. It does not diagnose, treat or cure any condition. If you have a health concern, speak with your doctor before starting a new practice.

Practice log

Print this page and keep a short record. Notes help you see patterns over time.

Day	Minutes	Reflection done	How it felt	Notes
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
9				
10				
11				
12				
13				
14				