



# Ancient Indian Civilization 2

## Exploring Common Core Concepts of Dharma Traditions

World History | Grades 6-7 | Anneda Nettleton, B.Ed., M.Ed., Ed.S.

### Note to teachers:

This is part 2 in a four-part series of lessons about understanding Ancient Indian civilizations and its ancient religions and societies. There is also a single lesson plan that provides a less in-depth look at the different components if there is minimal time for teaching about this topic.

### Materials:

- Dharmic Foundational Concepts Google Slideshow presentation
- Mokṣa Maze Materials
- Karma Chain Reaction
- Sorting Activity
- Sticky notes (1 per student)

# Dharmic Foundational Concepts

## Direct Instruction:

1. Start with a question using slides 2 and 3 of the Google Slideshow (Engage - 5 min):
  - "What are some ups and downs people experience in life?" (Students write brief responses on sticky notes. If time allows, have students walk around the room and discuss their responses with peers.)
  - "Does anyone know what the idea of samsara means?" (See what students say—this helps assess prior knowledge.)
  
2. Present Key Information (Explain - 20 min):
  - Go through the Dharmic Foundational Concepts slide.
  - Explain the first two concepts using slides 5 and 6.
  - Slide 7: Have students complete the Mokṣa Maze Activity.
  - Slides 8 and 9: Have students complete the Karma Chain Reaction activity after discussing Karma.
  - Explain the remaining concepts using slides 10 and 11.
  - Slides 12, 13, and 14: Direct students' attention to the questions provided on each slide.
    - **Think** – Have students individually reflect on what they notice about the graphic question. They should record their thoughts in the space provided and be prepared to share/discuss with peers.
    - **Pair** – Assign students to partners or small groups to share their answers and discuss perspectives
    - **Share** – Call on a few groups to share their insights with the whole class, facilitating a discussion to clarify and expand ideas.

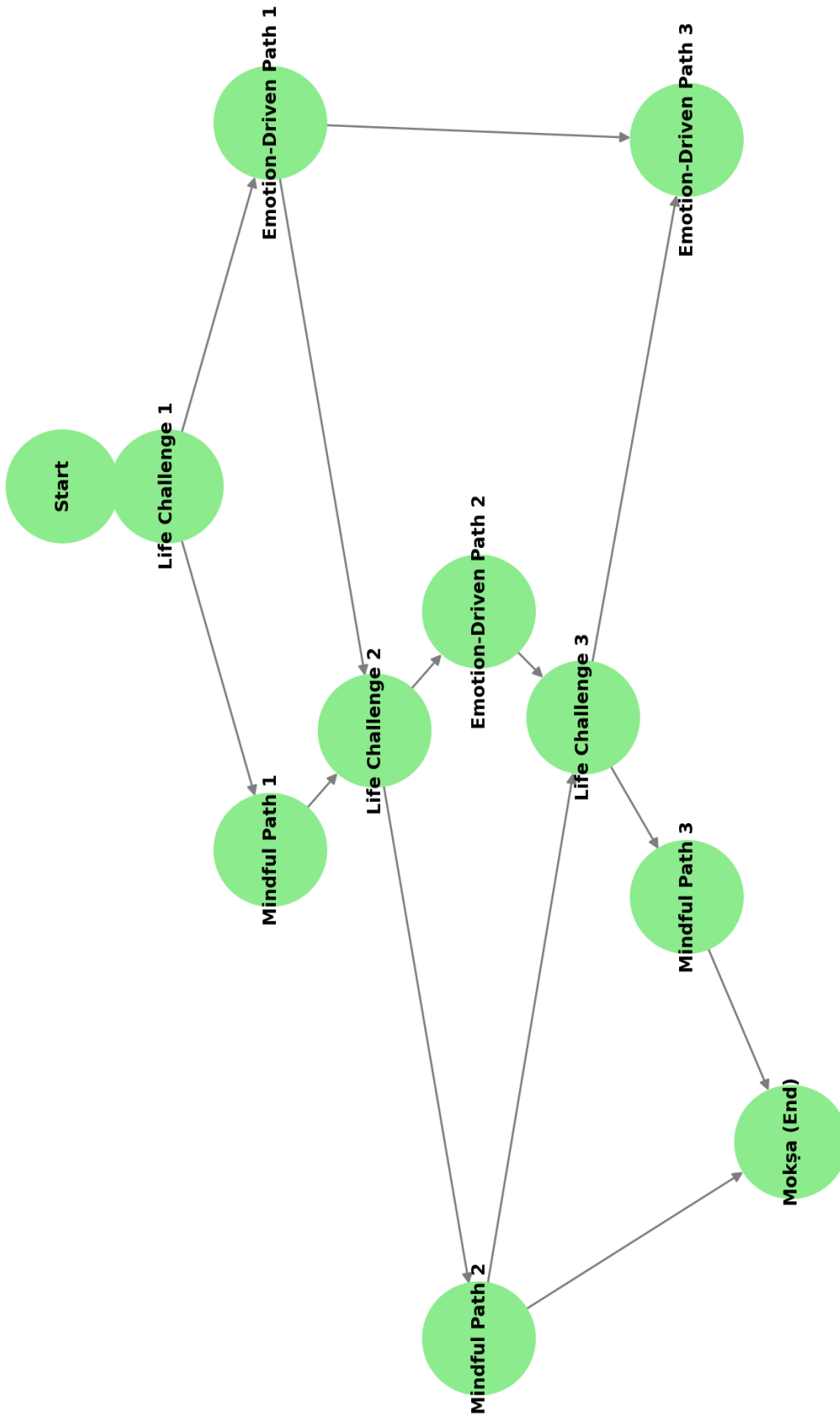
# Mokṣa Maze (Movement & Problem-Solving Activity)

**Concept:** *Mokṣa* (Freedom from Cycles of Struggles), also called *Nirvāṇa* or *Kaivalya* in some Dharma traditions

### How It Works:

- Create a **maze on the floor** using tape or cones. Label one end destination as Mokṣa. Students may reach this location by making mindful choices. Along the path, place “**Life Challenges**” cards using the cards provided in the table.
- **Students start at “Life Challenge 1.”** Each challenge has **two paths**:
  1. **One path represents a reaction driven by emotions (e.g., anger, frustration).**
  2. **One path represents a mindful response (e.g., patience, wisdom).**
- They **draw a scenario card** and choose between two responses:
  1. If they choose the mindful path, they move forward to the next challenge.
  2. If they choose the emotion-driven path, they repeat the challenge or move sideways to another similar situation.
  3. Multiple paths leading to Mokṣa (not just one fixed route).
  4. Some choices might make students repeat a challenge before moving on.
  5. The layout should allow for both forward and sideways movement.
  6. The goal is to **reach Mokṣa (End) in as few setbacks as possible.**

Dynamic Mokṣa Maze Setup (Decision-Based)



## Mokṣa Maze: Life Challenges & Choices

Students navigate a **maze on the floor**, facing **challenges** and choosing between **two paths**—one leading to **negative cycles** (*saṁsāra*) and the other leading toward **Mokṣa** (**wisdom and freedom from struggle**). **Choose the most relevant challenges for your students. There are many more here than you will need for the activity.**

Life Challenge	Path 1: Emotion-Driven Response ( <i>saṁsāra</i> - Repeating Struggles)	Path 2: Mindful Response (Mokṣa - Breaking Free)
<b>You fail a test.</b>	You get frustrated and decide to stop studying because you think you're not good enough.	You reflect on your mistakes, study harder, and ask for help to improve.
<b>A friend says something mean to you.</b>	You get angry and say something mean back, making the fight worse.	You take a deep breath, walk away, and later talk calmly to resolve the issue.
<b>You lose a sports game.</b>	You blame your teammates and refuse to play again.	You accept the loss, practice more, and encourage your teammates to improve.
<b>Someone takes credit for your idea in class.</b>	You argue loudly in front of everyone, creating more tension.	You calmly talk to the teacher after class and explain your side of the story.
<b>You get grounded for something your sibling did.</b>	You yell at your sibling and hold a grudge against them.	You explain the situation to your parents calmly and forgive your sibling.
<b>You want to buy something expensive but don't have enough money.</b>	You take money without asking or begging your parents repeatedly.	You save up, budget your spending, and wait until you can afford it.
<b>Your team has a group project, but someone isn't doing their part.</b>	You do all the work yourself but complain about it to others.	You talk to your teammate and ask how you can work together better.
<b>Your teacher gives you constructive criticism on your work.</b>	You feel embarrassed and ignore their advice.	You appreciate the feedback and use it to improve.

## Dharmic Foundational Concepts

<b>You break something at home.</b>	You hide it or blame someone else.	You admit your mistake and offer to fix or replace it.
<b>You have to wake up early for school, but you're tired.</b>	You stay up late again the next night, making it worse.	You adjust your bedtime and create a healthy sleep schedule.
<b>You accidentally spill water on your classmate's notebook.</b>	You pretend it didn't happen and walk away.	You apologize and offer to help dry or rewrite the notes.
<b>Your teacher calls on you in class, but you don't know the answer.</b>	You feel embarrassed and stop participating in future discussions.	You learn from the experience and prepare better next time.

<b>Your friend forgets to invite you to their party.</b>	You feel hurt and decide to stop talking to them.	You ask them about it and realize it was a mistake, not intentional.
<b>You accidentally spill water on your classmate's notebook.</b>	You pretend it didn't happen and walk away.	You apologize and offer to help dry or rewrite the notes.
<b>Your teacher calls on you in class, but you don't know the answer.</b>	You feel embarrassed and stop participating in future discussions.	You learn from the experience and prepare better next time.
<b>Someone cuts in front of you in line.</b>	You push them back and start an argument.	You calmly let them know you were there first or decide it's not worth fighting over.
<b>You feel jealous because a friend got something you really wanted.</b>	You act distant and avoid them because of your feelings.	You congratulate them and focus on your own goals.

### Karma Chain Reaction (Hands-On & Visual Activity)

**Concept:** *karma* (Cause and Effect)

**How It Works:**

- **Materials Needed:** Small index cards (or sticky notes).
- Each student writes **one action** on their card (e.g., "Helps a friend with homework" or "Cheats on a test").
- Collect and shuffle the cards, then **redistribute them randomly**.
- Now, students must **write a consequence** for the action they received (e.g., "The friend succeeds on the test" or "Gets in trouble for cheating").
- **Discuss:**
  - How do our choices shape our experiences?
  - Can we always predict the outcome of our actions?

 **Why it works?**

- Shows ***karma in action*** using real-life examples.
- **Engages students** by making them think about personal responsibility.

## Dharmic Foundational Concepts

### Sorting Activity (10 min)

- Provide students with a statement from the **Short, Memorable Statements** handout. Cut these apart in advance, so each student receives one. Identify a location in the room for students to go stand based on if they think the statement refers to *saṁsāra*, *karma*, *mokṣa*, *dharma*, or *sāghanā*.
  - Make sure they are provided to access with the following reminders:
    - *saṁsāra* (Cycles of Repetitive Ups & Downs)
    - *karma* (Cause and Effect of Actions)
    - *mokṣa* (Freedom from Life's Cycles)
    - *dharma* (Ethics & Values)
    - *sāghanā* (Practice & Discipline)

### Reflection (5min)

- Have students complete the Reflection Questions on the Reflection Sheet. Use slides 12, 13, and 14 to facilitate discussion and use of the Think-Pair-Share strategy.

### Assessment (15min)

- Have students complete the assessment.

### Direct Quotations to Supplement the Lesson Plan

*These quotations were taken directly from the “Common Foundational Concepts in the Hindu Dharmas” primer produced and written by the Center for Advancing Pluralism. More resources are available at <https://pluralist.org/>. Please note that due to the language and text complexity, these quotations may not be beneficial to our students’ understanding. Instead they are provided as excerpts to help you better prepare before sharing the content with students.*

- Slide 5:** “*saṃsāra* refers to the repetitive cycles of ups and downs: happiness-sadness, satisfaction-dissatisfaction, drive-aimlessness, etc. *Saṃsāra* is also discussed as continuing from one form of a sentient being’s existence to another, including in the sense of taking on a new body after death according to some, not all traditions.
- Slide 6:** “Finding insights through the Hindu Dharma traditions, an individual may discern that seeking mokṣa is their goal, and so will undertake the learning and practice required to go deeper. This can be done as they live a conventional life (*pravṛtti*), as part-time practitioners, or as full-time practitioners, leaving behind their former life to undertake a purely spiritual life (*nivṛtti*). Spiritual practice is called *sādhana* and each Hindu Dharma tradition has *sādhana* methods and rationales for numerous types of practitioners in accordance with each person’s own proclivities.”
- Slide 7:** “*Karma* that is selfless and without motive is the ideal; however the Hindu Dharma traditions are rational and accept that actions may have self-serving motivations and that there are degrees of both selfishness and selflessness.”
- Slide 9:** “Dharma does not have only one meaning; rather it is context-dependent.”
- Slide 10:** “Spiritual practice is called *sādhana* and each Hindu Dharma tradition has *sādhana* methods and rationales for numerous types of practitioners in accordance with each person’s own proclivities.”

### Short, Memorable Statements Sorting Activity

Cut apart to give each student one statement. From there, they will determine where to stand in the room based on which of the five concepts they feel it best represents.

## Memorable Statement

"Life moves in cycles—what we do today shapes tomorrow."

"The ups and downs of life are part of a greater journey."

"*Sam̐sāra* is like a spinning wheel—our actions keep it turning."

"Every action plants a seed—the harvest depends on what you sow."

"*Karma* isn't punishment, it's the echo of our choices."

"True peace comes when we rise above life's highs and lows."

## Dharmic Foundational Concepts

"*Mokṣa* is not escaping life—it's mastering it."

"To break free from the cycle, one must first understand it."

"*Dharma* is doing the right thing, even when no one is watching."

"Our roles in life change, but our duty to do good remains the same."

"To follow *dharma* is to walk the path of compassion and balance."

"Change happens not in a day, but in daily practice."

"Discipline is the bridge between who we are and who we want to be."

"*Sādhana* is the art of becoming better, one step at a time."

## Short, Memorable Statements Sorting Activity

### ANSWER KEY

Concept	Memorable Statement
<b>Saṁsāra (cycles of ups and downs)</b>	"Life moves in cycles—what we do today shapes tomorrow."
	"The ups and downs of life are part of a greater journey."
	" <i>Saṁsāra</i> is like a spinning wheel—our actions keep it turning."
<b>Karma (Cause and Effect of Actions)</b>	"Every action plants a seed—the harvest depends on what you sow."
	"Karma isn't punishment, it's the echo of our choices."
<b>Mokṣa (Freedom from Life's Cycles)</b>	"True peace comes when we rise above life's highs and lows."
	" <i>Mokṣa</i> is not escaping life—it's mastering it."
	"To break free from the cycle, one must first understand it."
<b>Dharma (Ethics &amp; Values)</b>	" <i>Dharma</i> is doing the right thing, even when no one is watching."
	"Our roles in life change, but our duty to do good remains the same."
	"To follow <i>dharma</i> is to walk the path of compassion and balance."
<b>Sādhana (Practice &amp; Discipline)</b>	"Change happens not in a day, but in daily practice."
	"Discipline is the bridge between who we are and who we want to be."
	" <i>Sādhana</i> is the art of becoming better, one step at a time."

## Dharmic Foundational Concepts Reflection Questions

**What do you think it means to have “inner freedom” (Mokṣa)?**

**Can you think of an example where someone made a choice (karma) that led to positive or negative outcomes?**

**How do responsibilities (dharma) change based on different roles (e.g. student, sibling, friend)?**

### Writing Task: Reflection on Myths and Facts About Ancient India

**Prompt:** Choose one of the Dharmic concepts we learned about today (*saṁsāra*, *mokṣa*, *karma*, *dharma*, *sādhana*). Explain what it means and give a real-life example of how someone might experience it or apply it in their life. Write a minimum of 7 sentences to explain the concept and related example.

#### Scoring Rubric (10 Points Total)

Category	Points	Description
<b>Understanding of Concept</b>	4	Clearly explains the meaning of the chosen concept.
<b>Real-Life Example</b>	3	Provides an example that accurately connects to the concept.
<b>Clarity &amp; Organization</b>	2	Writing is structured in clear sentences.
<b>Grammar &amp; Mechanics</b>	1	Writing has minimal spelling and grammar errors.