

OCT - DEC 2015

# THE ACROPOLITAN

A Magazine on Philosophy, Culture & Volunteering

FEATURE

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NA  
NEW ACROPOLIS

# THE ACROPOLITAN

In Ancient Greece, the Acropolis referred to the sacred centre, that lay higher than the rest of the city. It was a place of inspiration; a bridge that enabled citizens to connect to the divine, evoking the expression of the higher human virtues. Deriving inspiration from its purpose, The Acropolitan Magazine serves as a tribute to every citizen yearning for these higher principles in all aspects of Life: **Truth, Beauty, Justice, Goodness.**



**PHILOSOPHY** when practical, helps us to know and improve ourselves. It is a way of life, not an intellectual attitude, committed to the best aspirations of humanity.



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**VOLUNTEERING** is the natural expression of a spirit of union with life and humanity, which manifests in the practice of values such as unselfishness, commitment and striving for the common good.



## FROM THE EDITORIAL DESK

**Dear Reader,**

As if unraveling nature's secrets, L. Wolfe Gilbert wrote, "Those who find beauty in all of nature will find themselves at one with the secrets of life itself." And perhaps Man has yearned to interact with these secrets since the beginning of civilization; the lawyer through his quest for Justice, the scientist through his investigations to unravel Truth, and the artist through his ability to capture Beauty on a canvas, in the notes of a raga, or in the building of magnificent sacred spaces.

Although diverse, these journeys naturally converge to a single point; the serene and peaceful happiness that results from the realization of the unifying essence that lies beyond forms.

Perhaps this 'secret of life' is not really a secret after all. Nature seems to open wide her embrace, singing her song, unendingly inviting us to listen. We must just tune in and align with her laws, in order to find their resonance within. The approaching winter months are an introspective opportunity to discover, awaken, and transform.

**The Editorial Team**



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# THE INNER MIRROR

BY PROF. JORGE ANGEL LIVRAGA

TRANSLATED FROM SPANISH BY GILAD SOMMER

**Today,** as the myth of equality is losing force, it is easier to appreciate the wisdom of the ancients, who affirmed that all things and all beings have a different existence.

More than that, even within the same person it is difficult to find two identical states of mind throughout the course of a day, a month or a year. Unfortunately, apart from the exceptions that prove the rule, these states of mind often have a pernicious common denominator, which is to see the negative side of each and every thing.

**Everyone believes they have in some way the keys to success, but when they are put to the test they fail, usually casting the blame on others and adopting gloomy psychological positions.**

Everyone, in their own way, feels that they are a "martyr", misunderstood or victimized by others, that nobody loves or values them as much as they deserve, together with a long etcetera that will be impossible to detail here.

It is clear how egocentrism, with a lesser or greater tendency towards egoism, changes attitudes and behaviors, making intelligent people fools, workers lazy and potentially strong people weak.

The excess of individualism is as bad as the lack of it.

Everyone believes they have in some way the keys to success, but when they are put to the test they fail, usually casting the blame on others and adopting gloomy psychological positions. It is not uncommon to meet individuals who display a truly tyrannical attitude towards their subordinates, but are extremely sensitive when they have to obey or listen to someone correcting them. All joy will fade at that moment and a gray cloud will enfold their agonized consciousness, which will believe itself to be a victim of injustice, while proclaiming its own goodness and the errors of the other.

I have been deeply struck by this pessimistic and negative attitude when observing it over

the years in hundreds of people who could have had a much more authentic, positive and humble attitude towards life.

It reminds me of Plato's parable about the "Eye of the Soul", which, according to the direction in which it is turned, will see different landscapes and transmit dark, gray visions or truly luminous ones. I then imagined that we have something within us that is like an adjustable mirror. It reflects whatever it is directed towards. If it is left weak and slack, focusing on the lower aspects of the world, it will reflect only shadows, dangers, adversities. If with a little effort we manage to turn it upwards, even if only towards the horizon, its field of vision will considerably expand and without losing sight of the shadows, it will also see luminous horizons and many interesting beings and things, worth taking into consideration. The soul will expand its possibilities of perception and therefore its ability to discern, decide and act.

**By maintaining this reflection of Heaven in our Soul, everything will become easier, and our paths will become more pleasant, fruitful and joyful.**

If with a firm will we turn the mirror even higher upwards, the adversities of the world will disappear and a heaven of light will bring beauty and joy to our hearts. We will be naturally disposed towards success and joy, and wisdom will unfold, revealing true marvels as well as the hidden causes of the visible things. We will see the hands of God in every work and his immeasurable Thought reigning over every idea and every form.



Looking into the Inner Mirror

Thus, earnestly focused on the vision and experience of these wonders, we will gradually forget the objects of our petty egoism, our ignorance that loads onto other people's backs the weight of the responsibilities that ennoble and justify our lives.

By maintaining this reflection of Heaven in our Soul, everything will become easier, and our paths will become more pleasant, fruitful and joyful. Truly, it is worth the effort, since from one seed of will, a whole forest of well-being, happiness and emotional contentment will grow, as a result of being able to see with clarity the characteristics of the Path and of the travelers, which we cannot distinguish when the mirror is turned towards the shadows.

Hesitation will dwindle and fear will be replaced by a healthy, renewing and vital interest in life.

Complaints will turn to smiles and naturally we will become much more accepted by others...simply by turning our inner mirror upwards. ★★★

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Prof. Jorge Angel Livraga was the Founder and first International Director of International Organization New Acropolis. The translator of this article, Gilad Sommer, is the National Director of New Acropolis USA (Midwest).

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# BRINGING BACK THE HAPPINESS

BY PIERRE POULAIN



**I** was in Marseilles, in France, last December. I was presenting a special photographic exhibition about "Paradoxes" at the opening of a congress organized by the International Institute Hermes, for the 2400 year anniversary of the Academy of Plato.

At the end of the congress, Fernando Schwarz, the director of the Hermes Institute gave a lecture about the lack of Spiritual good as the real cause of the social crisis in occidental societies.

It impacted me so much that I decided to retain the idea and to develop it in an article for Acropolis magazine.

Our world is in crisis. I won't demonstrate it...it is clearly evident. People are suffering, and it seems that humanity is just losing, every day more, the ability to be happy. Happiness is becoming quite a shadow, a legend...a strange concept belonging to fantasy or to the past, but certainly not to our present and it is sadly more and more difficult to imagine it being present in our future.

Happiness is not - apparently - an easy good to acquire. Nowadays, people don't know where to

look for it, and they are searching for it in a lot of places where in reality it does not belong. Some will search for it in the fullness of material goods, and money will be for them the key to open the gates of a possible paradise. Others will look for it in the conquest of a social position. Those will fight for a diploma, a career, a status.

There are also those who will search for happiness in an ideology, be it religious or secular, and think that humanity will embrace happiness when all will recognize their specific way of life, and will live according to its principles. But this is only fanaticism, and fanaticism cannot lead to happiness.

**Happiness is not bought, and it even cannot be given as a gift.**

And there are those who will search for happiness in a political or economical theory...but until now, there are no real examples of these being real solutions.

It seems that happiness escapes all these fields, and cannot be found there. Why not? Maybe because

these are solutions based on the "acquisition" of an external good - it can be a material item or an ideological concept, it is still something I have to "get", to "buy" or to "accept" from an external source.

But Happiness cannot come from any external source. Happiness is not bought, and it even cannot be given as a gift.

The nature of happiness is not a material one. Real happiness, or better the "felicity", the "Eudemonia" of the ancient Greek philosophers is a sort of "state of consciousness", a permanent state. It is not something which could be dependent on continuous movement, change and quantity of material goods. Happiness must be permanent, or not be at all. It cannot rely on anything material and "external" to be or not to be, because it is not the product of material goods, but the consequence of reaching true liberation: the freedom from the attachment to the material need, or at least to the illusion of thinking that we can be neither free nor happy without material goods.

But is it enough to be detached from material goods to be happy? Certainly not, because if it would be the case, then the millions of new poor people generated by worldwide economical crisis would have discovered happiness instead of suffering and anger.

Detachment may be a necessary condition, because it allows us to open the eyes and to begin to search in other directions. But it is not enough. When we cease to look at material goods as tools we need to work with to gain happiness, we need to encounter other tools, made from another essence, and those are metaphysical goods.

Metaphysical tools we can understand as "virtues". Not moral virtues, but archetypal ones. I mean a quality which is "by essence" in every human being, but is not always manifested. Thus it is something which can be found in the "potentiality", in the



possible, but still invisible, and not yet a quality visible through our daily acts and way of life.

The logic is simple: a material good has to be produced by material tools. And a metaphysical good can only be produced by metaphysical tools. Being of a metaphysical essence, happiness cannot be produced by anything material.

**The logic is simple: a material good has to be produced by material tools. And a metaphysical good can only be produced by metaphysical tools.**

But the most important question is still: How can one develop these virtues, these archetypal qualities to reach happiness? Is it easy? Is it simple? Is it something anyone can reach?

It may seem difficult, because we are not used to dealing with these metaphysical goods, and we have no idea where to "buy" them. These are not goods to buy, thus the dependence on an economical situation is here nonexistent. It seems difficult because it is new for most of us, but the difficulty is no more than a change of habits. In



reality it cannot be so difficult...on the contrary it should be easier than trying to reach happiness through the illusion of using material tools.

It should be easier because happiness here does not depend on anything external which we should first search, reach, conquer, possess...we already have it. In a virtual, or potential state, of course, but it is ours. The virtues are ours already; we just have to "activate" them.

## Nobody will bring us happiness if not ourselves.

It should be easier also, and mainly, because it is less an illusion and more a reality. Or at least...an illusion closer to reality. Real happiness cannot be affected by the changes and loss of cycles which are the expression of life in the material. Everything I possess will vanish in time. Everyone I love will be separated from me in time. Happiness has to find its roots in permanence and in stability. And these are exactly the qualities of the archetypal virtues we are talking about: love without condition, fraternity among human beings, tolerance, courage, the capacity to not make compromises with the just, the good, the beautiful and the right. These are philosophical virtues, and this is why philosophy is a cure to suffering.

Of course, philosophy has to be considered as a practice, and not just knowledge. Philosophy was in fact, since its beginning, a way of life before it became nearly exclusively an intellectual acquisition of knowledge.

Happiness is not about knowledge. Knowing that fraternity exists as a concept may only lead to bitterness, seeing the distance between what we could - and should - have achieved and the dark reality of our life, where the "other" is usually

seen more as "different" rather than as another expression of the "same". Humanity is one but only in the archetypal values and in our dreams.



But didn't a poet say, "Don't say the day will come... make it come!"? It's the same when related to happiness. Nobody will bring us happiness if not ourselves. Nobody, and no material good.

The practice of philosophy is the way to develop our own potential and to manifest the results - the development of Virtues - our life. It is the simplest and the natural way to become a producer of metaphysical goods, and thus to reclaim happiness as a natural due and right for humanity.

This means that we have to decide to work with our potential, and not only with the manifested. We need to build a bridge between the virtual and the material, and to allow the archetypes to walk on this bridge, processing from the invisible toward our consciousness. At the same time, we have to walk also, raising our consciousness upward, so that we may meet in the middle of the bridge and be reborn to what we should be: a wiser, and a happier human being. ★★★

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This article was first published in Hebrew in December 2013 in the Acropolis Magazine of Israel. Mr. Pierre Poulain is the Founder and National Director of New Acropolis Israel.

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# A CLASSICAL VOYAGE: MUSIC AND LIFE

BY SHRADDHA SHETTY

*"Beauty is eternity gazing at itself in the mirror.  
But you are the eternity, and you are the mirror."  
- Kahlil Gibran*

**The** sunrise, or sunset of course, doesn't care if we watch it or not. It will keep on being beautiful, whether we look at it, recognize it, or not. It follows that there exists in this world an eternal objective principle which we call Beauty, independent of us. Sometimes we recognize it, sometimes we do not; it depends upon our subjective point of view. If the objective is like the sky, the subjective is like a closed window to the sky. The objective is the ever existing absolute principles, or forces; you can call them the archetypes, divinity...whatever you wish to name it. The windows are the many aspects of visible human life: art, science, religion and politics. It is our choice to clean the window or allow it to be hazy, to open or close it. This is where our subjectivity could block the view or make us channels of the eternal principles of Beauty, Truth, Goodness and Justice. The fact that anyone can open the window means that somewhere in each of our hearts, regardless of time, place, color or caste, there is a common human yearning for the eternal skies of goodness.

Richard Feynmann, a Nobel Prize-winner in the field of quantum physics said, "An artist friend holds up a flower and says, 'Look how beautiful it is,' and I agree. Then he says, 'I as an artist can see how beautiful this is but you as a scientist will take this all apart and it becomes a dull thing'...Although I may not be quite as refined aesthetically as he is...I see much more about the flower than he sees...beauty at smaller dimensions, the inner structure, also the processes...It only adds. I don't understand how it subtracts."

The goal of art and science thus remains the same: to discover the mysteries of life. Any form which creates a channel towards these mysteries would serve its purpose and hence be expressing justice. In other words such a form can be called a classical form. The root of the word 'classic' is Latin *klass-ik*, meaning 'of the highest rank', or highest quality. Let us take the example of classical music.

According to Leonard Bernstein, an atom of music is not a single note at all, but at least two notes; the resulting two-note relationship is called an interval. This interval is the heart and soul of a piece of music. Melody is where notes follow each other in time horizontally, one after another. Harmony

is when notes sound simultaneously, harnessing time vertically either ascending or descending, in inversion etc. The relationships between these musical atoms and their intervals in melody and harmony form music.<sup>1</sup>

There is a creative discovery embodied in classical compositions, which in addition to the domain of art, deals with fundamental issues confronting mathematics and the physical sciences as well.<sup>2</sup> Beethoven, perhaps one of the most celebrated composers in the world created most of his renowned compositions after he became deaf. How? The answer lies in his ingenious sensitivity to the patterns and the mathematics hidden behind the beautiful sounds.

Nature itself is full of patterns that can be described mathematically. For example: rainbows, spider webs, honeycombs, markings on animal furs, etc. Our universe is governed by laws of nature which are constant.

**There is a common  
human yearning  
for the eternal skies  
of goodness.**

A classical form, like nature, is also mathematically designed and governed by laws, which create a harmonious co-existence and balance between its various parts.

Today we see ourselves and the world, and we can clearly understand how far from nature, harmony and balance we have come. I think the chaos that we see in the world is merely a reflection of an internal disorder. Today in general we face our backs to the windows of eternity, and we are ignorant of them. In our fast-paced lives, where time seems to be slipping away, any form of art which is in

fashion becomes popular. What is it that attracts us to any form of music? For some it is the lyrics, for some it is the beat, for many it is the mood at that moment of time. In other words we can call it contemporary art: *co-temporary*, relating to a temporary, always changing, trend.



When compared to contemporary music, classical music sustains the test of time. Without generalizing, you might listen to a pop song of today which is a craze, but 300 years down the line, don't you think the craze will die out? Unlike Beethoven's compositions, still appreciated at concerts around the world. Another major difference is that classical compositions are able to sustain our attention, even if the duration is several hours, unlike contemporary pieces which last for a few minutes.

Thus as per my understanding the mathematical laws behind classical art, similar to that of nature, have enabled the form to transmit the sense of timelessness. Like nature it effectively creates a channel for the archetypes to express themselves in the world. Thus to nurture this tradition of classical art is of grave importance today, and that too in an exact manner. This is our link to return to the essential, and the closest a human being has gotten until now in manifesting the eternal essence. But in executing this art form, there is another important element involved: the consciousness of the artist himself.

When an individual begins to study a classical form of art, it becomes a voyage towards perfection,



where on one hand he tries to master the technique of the art form in an exact way, as was handed down to him, without subjective improvisations. On the other hand, the artist himself does not remain the same before and after and hence, if sincere, he will be transformed. While exploring and mastering the harmonious whole of the classical form the artist also strives to explore the human within himself in order to bring about a harmony between his various inner voices. It becomes a process of expanding one's consciousness, as one constantly pushes one's limits. The whole process is a journey not just of pleasure of the senses, but for the discovery of the eternal laws of life encoded in the classical art form. In doing so, it becomes a spiritual journey for the artist himself.

The artist's consciousness reaches beyond his subjective perspective, and he rediscovers the existence of a strong objective self, his true spiritual identity. His identification resonates with the objective archetype of Beauty which is expressed in the classical form, and hence the artist will become a channel for it.

**The whole process is a journey not just of pleasure of the senses, but for the discovery of the eternal laws of life encoded in the classical art form.**

One has to practice with perseverance on this path, maintain rhythm, and put one's ego aside. Every challenge overcome by the artist will be a discovery of inner strength. Every step towards cleaning the subjective window and opening that channel, will reveal a new ray of light which was always there waiting to enter. Only when he forgets himself in the

art will an artist truly find himself.

There are also various studies which show the benefits of listening to classical music. In addition to humans these effects have also been demonstrated on plants and animals.<sup>34</sup>



Classicism in art is thus an attitude of perfecting forms, enriching both the performer and the audience. Such an attitude of striving to discover the eternal divinity through action could be called a classical way of living, an ethical life. It is that way of human life wherein each individual directs his limited resources in space and time in order to nurture, shape, and explore the possibility to create channels in order to allow the secrets of eternity into his room of existence. Keeping this as the centre of his life, never diverting from this direction, when a man conducts every aspect of his life, he is living his life in a classical manner. This attitude will make an individual noble and hence the society ethical in its true sense. ★★★

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# THE MYSTERY OF ANIMAL MIGRATION

BY JULIAN SCOTT

by Francesco Veronesi | Flickr | CC BY-NC-SA 2.0

**The** world record for animal migration is held by a bird called the arctic tern; its journey, starting within weeks of hatching, will take it from northern Greenland, down the western coasts of Europe and Africa, across the Antarctic Ocean to the South Pole – a total of around 11,000 miles. Less than a year later, it will cover the same distance again on its return journey home.

But it's not only the mileage that's impressive. How do English swallows know the route to their winter feeding grounds in South Africa, 6,000 miles away and then manage to find their way back again in spring to breed, often to the very same place where they nested in the previous year?

The biologist Rupert Sheldrake, who deals with this and other questions in his book *Dogs that know when their owners are coming home and other unexplained powers of animals*, gives another example to illustrate the extraordinary navigational skills of migratory animals. "Baby green turtles that have hatched on the beaches of Ascension Island, in the middle of the Atlantic, find their way across the ocean to the ancestral feeding grounds off the Brazilian coast. Years later, when the time comes for them to lay their eggs, they then make their way back to Ascension Island, only six miles across and

over 1,400 miles away, with no land in between". Their ability to navigate, he says, is one of the great unsolved mysteries of biology.

***It is also interesting to note that some so-called 'primitive' people – i.e. those more in touch with nature – also tend to have a highly developed navigational ability.***

"More amazing still", continues Sheldrake, "is the instinctive ability of young birds to home to their ancestral winter quarters without being guided by birds that have done it before. European cuckoos, raised by birds of other species, do not know their parents. In any case, the older cuckoos leave for southern Africa in July or August before the new generation is ready to go. About four weeks later, the young cuckoos find their own way to their ancestral feeding grounds in Africa, unaided and unaccompanied." How do they do this?

The hypothesis currently accepted by most biologists is that these migrating animals have an

innate genetic program which directs them along a certain route using the orientation provided by the sun, moon and stars, a magnetic sense and, in some cases, the sense of smell.

Although there have been successful experiments to show that all these factors play a part, the theory is not entirely satisfactory. One of its flaws is that the heavenly bodies are not always visible, either due to cloudy conditions or, in the case of fish or marine turtles, because they are underwater; another is that the Earth's magnetic field is constantly varying and therefore cannot be relied upon. As for the sense of smell, this may help when an animal is nearing its destination – as in the case of the Atlantic salmon – and can 'smell' its home waters, but not when it is thousands of miles away in mid ocean. Moreover, birds like the albatross do not follow a set route and are able to return home from anywhere. Like many of these animals, they just seem to know the way intuitively.

The main alternative theory for explaining the navigational ability of migratory animals is the so-called 'goal-oriented' system. This proposes that there is a 'pull' from the destination which enables the animal to 'know' where to go. The animals can also use other navigational aids, in addition to this innate sense – such as the position of the sun, moon and stars or the earth's magnetism – but can still find their way without them.

A number of experiments support the 'goal-oriented' theory. One of these, conducted by the Dutch biologist A.C. Perdeck in the 1950s, involved capturing migrating birds en-route to their destination, flying them by plane to a place off their normal course and seeing if they could still get there. Another 'experiment' happened by accident when a turtle was taken from Ascension Island to England in 1865. When the ship reached the English Channel, the turtle was looking unhealthy, so it was thrown overboard. Two years later it was caught again at Ascension Island, and

recognized because it had been branded. So how did it manage to return?

It is also interesting to note that some so-called 'primitive' people – i.e. those more in touch with nature – also tend to have a highly developed navigational ability. "One of the most spectacular demonstrations of this ability was given by Tupaia, a dispossessed high chief and navigator from Raiatea, near Tahiti. Captain James Cook met him in 1769 on his first great voyage of exploration, and invited him to travel on board the Endeavour. During a journey of over 6,000 miles [...] Tupaia was able to point towards Tahiti at any time, despite the distance involved and the ship's circuitous route." (Sheldrake, p.158)

***All the knowledge of past individuals of a group of animals goes into a collective mind which processes the information and makes it available to all present and future animals of that group.***

What is the explanation for these remarkable abilities? David Attenborough, in his *Life on Earth*, says: "There seems to be no single answer: they use many methods. Some we are beginning to understand; some mystify us; and there may be some that depend on abilities we have not yet suspected."

Rupert Sheldrake believes that the phenomenon can be explained through his theory of 'morphic resonance'. He proposes that migrating animals are connected to their native beaches, feeding grounds or winter homes by what he calls 'morphic fields'. "These fields have an inherent memory transmitted by morphic resonance which causes a given







organism, such as a migrating bird, to resonate with previous migrating birds of the same kind. Thus, when a young cuckoo sets off from England towards Africa, it draws upon a collective memory of its ancestors. This memory, inherent in the morphic field of its migratory path, guides it as it goes, giving it landmarks, feeding grounds and resting places. This collective memory also enables it to recognize when it has arrived at its destination."

Esoteric tradition uses the term 'group soul' to (partially) explain this phenomenon. All the knowledge of past individuals of a group of animals goes into a collective mind which processes the information and makes it available to all present and future animals of that group.

Butterflies are a case in point. Every summer, the 'painted lady' butterfly arrives in Britain from North Africa to breed – a non-stop journey of 1,000 miles. On arrival, they reproduce immediately and it is this second generation that will make the return journey to Africa in autumn. In other words, it is not the same butterflies that fly back, but new ones which have not travelled the route before, but nevertheless know the way.

***There are mysteries in nature, phenomena that cannot be wholly explained by reductionist science.***

The study of these and other marvels of nature (including the nature of the human being) can make us more aware that natural processes are far from purely mechanical, automatic and wholly explicable by a materialistic view of life which likes to see everything in the most prosaic terms. There are mysteries in nature, phenomena that cannot be wholly explained by reductionist science. This is not to say that they have no

explanation, or that they cannot be understood; but sometimes the more appropriate vehicle of understanding is the intuitive mind.



Thus, the poetic and imaginative spirit also has something to contribute to these matters, so I would like to end by quoting from a recent book on the migrating swallow (*A Single Swallow*, 2009) by the wonderfully named Horatio Clare, who followed the migration route of the swallows from South Africa to Wales: "Before I went I loved them [swallows] aesthetically: they were beautiful and quick. Now I also admire their strength and their persistence. It's quite something to live as swallows do on the wing, taking perpetual risk. It's not just how they live, it's the emotional way that they live: their fearlessness, their joie de vivre and their adventurousness that I love. They were so majestic, graceful and had such a dash about them that I felt privileged to be with them."

Projecting his own feelings, the materialist might say, but why not? Man is part of nature and nature is part of us. We and the swallows are one. ★★★

# IN CONVERSATION WITH GESHE LHAKDOR

BY YARON BARZILAY  
COMPILED BY MANJULA NANAVATI

Geshe Lhakdor addresses students

**During** their grueling journey across the Himalayas, Tibetan refugees carried hundreds of manuscripts into India, often guarding them with their lives. Many of these precious texts were offered to His Holiness the Dalai Lama, who founded the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives in Dharamsala (India), dedicated to preserve and promote the Tibetan heritage. Today it is internationally recognized by Tibetan scholars as a pre-eminent education center, specialized in Language, Philosophy, Culture, Translation, and Science. It houses numerous manuscripts, hundreds of thangka scrolls, and a variety of artifacts in its museum.

In August 2015, Yaron Barzilay (Director of New Acropolis Cultural Organization India - North) met with Geshe Lhakdor, Director of the Library, as well as the Central Archive of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. *Geshe* translates as 'virtuous friend' and is a rigorous Tibetan Buddhist academic degree for monks and nuns. Here are excerpts from their conversation.

**Yaron Barzilay: Can you share a little bit about your personal journey so far?**

Geshe Lhakdor: I was born in Tibet. When I was

young I escaped to India and went to regular school. After I finished my 11th class, I joined the Institute for Buddhist Dialectics in Dharamsala to study this philosophy. I studied here for 13 years. Then I went to South India to finish my Doctorate of Divinity. I worked at the Tibetan House in New Delhi and two and a half years later I was invited to join His Holiness the Dalai Lama's office. I worked for sixteen years as his translator, travelling to many places. In 2005 I became the director of this Institute.

**YB: I understand you are also a trustee for The Foundation of Universal Responsibility of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. From that perspective, how do you see the current scenario in the world?**

GL: According to Buddhist teaching, it's very easy; one of the most fundamental teachings is "May all sentient beings be happy." It is even beyond human beings. All sentient beings! That's the Buddhist prayer. Much bigger than globalization, it is an even more universal attitude, which includes birds, animals, everything. But the most important concept within that is inter-dependent origination [sic]; nations have to work together, people have to work together, and we have to live in harmony with the environment.



YB: Would you describe the current world scenario as positive?

GL: Basically, I would say it is positive. But there are many that don't want change, who say 'My religion is best' and not only that but, 'we should destroy all other religions'. This is really terrible, but it is reality.

**Pessimism is not a solution.  
We must hope for the best.  
Future Presidents and Prime  
Ministers will come from  
among ordinary people.**

However, at least today we are talking about globalization, protecting the environment, human rights, rights of women. You see, those things were never discussed before, whether there was no need, or no awareness, whatever the case. Today we are compelled to pay attention to these things.

YB: There is definitely more need. But the question is whether world leaders are responding to this need. Are we living in a world that nurtures spiritual needs? Or is it a world that is more materialistic?

GL: I do not want to give you a pessimistic picture...

YB: No, a realistic one...

GL: ..but at the same time, what world leaders are doing, is far from enough. As you can see, the majority of world leaders are concerned with business, because the possibility of them remaining as leaders is very dependent on the business community. And because of their money, businesses have a lot of say. There was a time when the world was ruled by army generals...now rich people rule the world. Therefore all leaders fall in line with the rich and whenever there is a possibility to do business, you close your eyes to human rights. It's happening and it's very sad. So long as you



Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, Front facade

Image Courtesy: Yaron Barzilai



have an economic benefit you keep your mouth shut. When your need is in jeopardy, then you start shouting. That's not good. And ordinary people can't do much about this.

But pessimism is not a solution. We must hope for the best. Future Presidents and Prime Ministers will come from among ordinary people. So as you rightly mentioned, we need to come up with a philosophy based on which we nurture young people who care for these values, so that we can hope to get good leaders who don't only think about money but who also think about the quality of human life.

**YB: We spoke earlier about the importance of preservation. How do you strike a balance between preserving the past, and the ability to adapt in a constantly changing world?**

GL: When you talk about preservation or conservation, we talk about preserving what is there already. When you talk about adaptation, it's a whole new way of seeing things. It's a totally new emerging concept. All texts have proper lineage coming from the Buddha. You cannot just make one text. Philosophical treatises have been thoughtfully written and many of these texts have been based on personal experience and meditation. This is change and adaptation. Of course many Buddhist teachings

are perennial teachings. They are everlasting. So even with change, they do not change. For example, the teaching of Impermanence; Impermanence itself means change. The concept is already there.

**YB: You mean that there are eternal principles.**

GL: Yes. And they don't need to change.

**YB: But the forms, through which these eternal principles manifest, can change?**

GL: The way you explain to people, the examples you give, may have to change.

**YB: For example, your use of English.**

GL: Exactly, for people who speak English it is easier for them to understand. Also, if you are able to explain the Buddhist teachings with recent scientific findings; that will help people develop conviction. The end purpose is that through this we can help them improve physical and mental health. Everybody needs good mental health.

**If you look at nature, which includes you and me, you will flourish only if you are in harmony with yourself. If your mind and body is in harmony, you will be healthy.**

**YB: It's more important than the physical.**

GL: Much more important. And the mental health of the people in the world is not so good.

**YB: To many, Tibet is synonymous with wisdom. From a purely philosophical point of view, do you have any advice for those interested in the wisdom of Tibetan Buddhism, beyond its religious aspects?**



GL: Without making it complicated, without making it just a religious issue, the core of this philosophy basically says, 'Live in harmony with nature.' If you look at nature, which includes you and me, you will flourish only if you are in harmony with yourself. If your mind and body is in harmony, you will be healthy. Likewise if you are in harmony with the people you live with, you will prosper. Similarly if your nation is in harmony with other nations, with the environment, then you will develop and flourish. That's the law of nature.

The philosophy that Buddha taught is not something he invented. It is something that he discovered. It is there in you, and in me, but we are not paying attention. And the Buddha said, 'Pay attention...the law of nature is impermanence...you are going to change...you are going to die.' But we don't want to pay attention to this. We want to live forever, buy a big fancy home, buy a big fancy car. To summarize, we should have the right, correct mental perspective, which is true to the way things are. Then you will be happy. If you say one thing and do something

else, it's not harmony. You are asking for problems. Understand the law of nature; cultivate an unbiased mental perspective, then you will be happy.

**If you don't know where you are making a mistake, how will you reach the place where there are no mistakes? It is important to open up, and listen, and talk to other people.**

The need to achieve the highest happiness through religious practice is the most important issue for all. Whether you believe in religion, or you are anti-religion...it doesn't matter. We all want happiness. But how are we going to get it? The Buddha said you are not going to get it from the outside; your parents, your relatives, your fancy car, your money - they will give you some comfort, a little happiness,

but not ultimate happiness. At the end of the day, if you really want long lasting peace, it has to come from within yourself. So you must cultivate the right mental perspective, which will not be disturbed or shaken by changing situations and events. And if you don't have that perspective, if you just run after changing situations and events, then your happiness is dependent on external circumstances and you will never be happy.

And more importantly, that which makes you narrow minded, sectarian, and biased, are the negative emotions within yourself. Anger, jealousy, hatred...these negative emotions restrict and constrict your life. They will suffocate you. So get rid of them and you will be free. The Buddha says, the real enemy is not outside, it is inside yourself. Recognize this.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama summarizes this point by saying that Buddhist philosophy states that you should understand the interconnected reality. The reason you should love others and be compassionate to others is because we are all interconnected. How can you be mean and negative to those on whom you are dependent? If you destroy the environment, you will be the one to suffer. It's as clear as that.

**YB: This is the credo of stoic philosophers, Aristotle and Plato. It is a simple truth. We live in a seemingly educated world today, and most people will agree with what you say. Yet people don't act in accordance. Why is that? If they did, the world would be a different place.**

GL: Because we are like small kids. We think we are grown up. As you said we are educated. Yes, to some extent. We are professors, scientists, etc. But on another level still we are like small kids who only want to play with their toys as if that's everything. Similarly, to those who are enlightened like the Buddha, we are like very small kids - fighting with each other and completely distracted by smaller,

meaningless things. There is no time to think about bigger issues. And people who have the time, and some knowledge, are unable to practice it because their whole way of life is habituated to something else. Die-hard habits are difficult to throw away, and in many cases are addictions.

**YB: So the challenge is the ability to live in accordance to what we understand as right?**

GL: Exactly. There is a process. And Buddhist texts very clearly say that the scripture is like a mirror. When you look at a mirror, if you find a dark spot, you have to remove it. If you just look at the mirror and see the dark spot, and don't do anything, what is the use of looking in that mirror? Similarly, when the text says compassion is good, you must ask, 'Do I have it?' And if I don't, I must activate it. Anger is bad. 'Do I have anger?' 'Yes, I have anger. I must remove it.' Just like removing the dark spot. That's the process. But normally we just look at the mirror and don't do anything. We are all sailing in the same boat. The majority of us have no knowledge. Many have knowledge, but no practice. That's the problem.

**YB: I've read many stories of western explorers who set off on the arduous journey to look for the mystical land of Tibet...**

GL: A Shangri-La.

**YB: And for centuries it was forbidden for foreigners to even enter Tibet?**

GL: Yes. Yes. Every government has their rules and regulations.

**YB: And if I may say so, Tibet is in a completely different place today than it was a hundred years ago. Is there some meaning in this?**

GL: That is what I have been telling you. If you go against nature, sooner or later you will be the





Geshe Lhakdor with a graduating class of Tibetan Language Course

loser. Tibetans closing themselves is almost like going against nature. Because the rest of the world was developing, making scientific, technological advances. But Tibetans thought that they had enough. They were at peace and content. But because of no contact there was no modernization, no science, no technology. So China could very easily come in and trample them. You cannot remain happy in your own cocoon, without seeing what is outside. That is the Buddha's teaching. Look at nature, reality, it's important.

So some people have said Buddhism is pessimistic. But I tell them Buddhism is realistic. But the people practicing Buddhism are not realistic. That's the problem. There is a gap between the teaching and the practitioners.

**YB: Realistic by definition is also positive?**

GL: Of course. Positive. Reality is something you have to accept. That's why the Buddha was talking about sickness, suffering, and death. This is realistic. So not only in the teaching hall, but also in your life,

you have to have an open mind, ready to accept reality and not confine yourself to one small thing and say, "This is the best." How can you say my religion is best when you don't know anything about another religion? You need to learn even from those philosophies that are not argumentally sound, because the Buddhist teachings say that the lower philosophical thoughts are like steps to climb towards the higher thoughts. If you don't know where you are making a mistake, how will you reach the place where there are no mistakes? It is important to open up, and listen, and talk to other people. This did not happen.

**YB: Do you see a role for the philosophy of Tibetan Buddhism in the world today?**

GL: The most important key is to develop compassion towards everybody. But human beings are human beings. How many people are really able to practice this? It's not easy because as human beings you have faults and foibles. You say something; I get angry, my compassion disappears. It is not easy, but the desired goal is to see everybody

in the same light, including even the tiniest insect.

It's out of madness due to negative emotions that we are harming each other, obstructing each other, and there is no peace. Look at the so-called Big Powers who have become big and powerful because of the arms that they have stock piled. Arms and ammunition for killing people, and still we say "intelligent" human beings? We are at the stage where nobody can stop. You know what happened in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and today it's much more powerful than that. So we need wisdom.

**YB: I agree.**

GL: We need your philosophy.

**YB: We need your philosophy.**

GL: With just a little common sense, the world will be fine, even if you don't know the very subtle structure of the nucleus of the atom. In ancient times, people didn't know about these things and yet lived harmoniously. That's why when some very important questions were asked to the Buddha, like 'Is there a beginning to the universe?' and 'Is there life hereafter?' he did not reply.

You see, you need not have an answer to every question. A starving man does not need a five star feast; he just needs something to eat. Today's situation is like that. If you get deep philosophy - that's good. But if you don't - at least there should be common sense. But are we able to practice it? That is the problem.

**If you get deep philosophy - that's good. But if you don't - at least there should be common sense. But are we able to practice it? That is the problem.**

**YB: I agree. It is an intellectual way of living.**

GL: Yes. And the most important teaching in Buddhism says that even if the whole world is turbulent, you should be in peace.

**YB: Like the Stoics who said, "You need to be like a rock in stormy waters."**

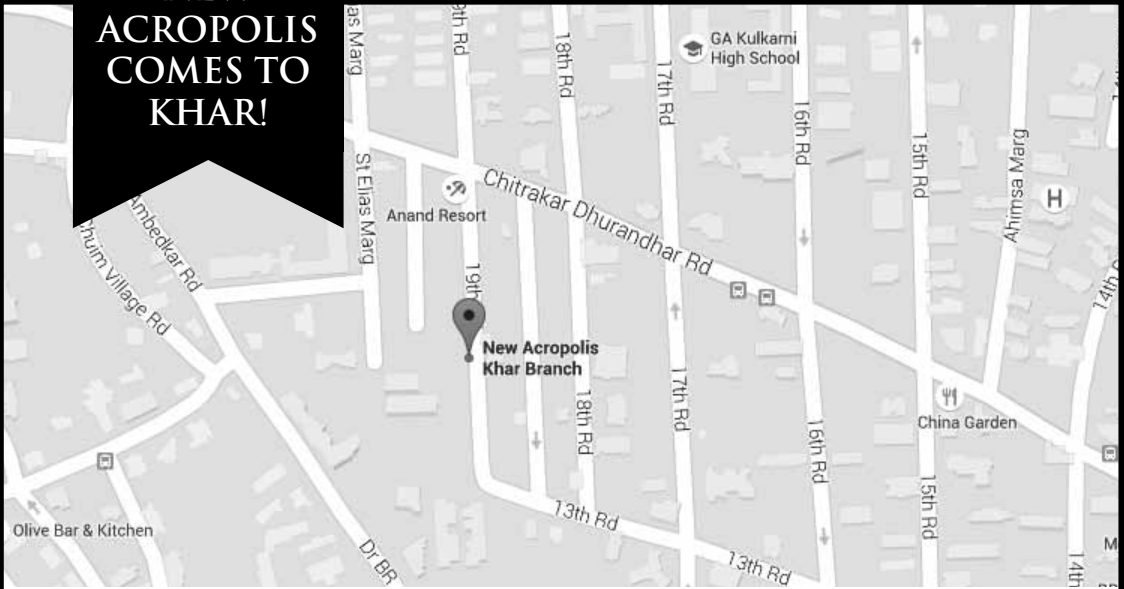
GL: Exactly. Just like that. ★★★



Geshe Lhakdor addresses assembly of visitors at the Library

Image Courtesy: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives

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# ARCHITECTING THE INVISIBLE

BY KURUSH DORDI

**When** architects design a building in our times, they share the plan of a proposed building and get the client to approve its design, based on which the building is then taken up for construction. But how do you design a building when your client is divine, or in the invisible?

In spite of magnificent palaces, beautiful gardens, and colossal libraries from the ancient world, sacred sites have most often been considered the epitome of man's architectural achievements. Perhaps there is something unsaid in the sentiment of ancient sacred structures, which never fails to inspire, inviting us to get lost in their splendour. Be it the ruins of Angkor Wat, the mighty columns of the Temple of Karnak or the serene stillness of a Gothic church, the harmonic proportions, beauty and layout of these masterpieces continue to inspire and amaze.

The disciplines that contributed to the mystique of sacred spaces included mathematics, philosophy, art, and religion. Unlike in modern times, it seems that these were not seen as distinctly different sciences, separate and lacking correlation with each other. Instead they were fundamentally interdependent.

So we find that in ancient civilisations there was no art that was not religious, no religion that was not philosophical, no philosophy that was not scientific and no science that wasn't art.

Aside from the obvious art and architectural elements that contributed to the designing of sacred spaces (materials used, colour, symbology) many subtle and invisible elements contributed to the making of sacred spaces. Ancient architects took inspiration from what they saw around them in the natural world as a model of harmonious perfection, a reflection of the Divine. They observed the repeating patterns and natural geometrical principles such as the Golden Ratio, or Golden Mean. Referred to as Phi in mathematics, or expressed as 1:1.618, this ratio is abundantly evident in nature: the flower of an artichoke, chambers of a nautilus sea shell, the positioning of a leaf on a branch, as well as proportions of a human body. The Golden Ratio by itself does not just function as a harmonic proportion but is the primary basis of a philosophical idea that bridges Nature and Life to the temporary world of physical shape.

The use of various geometric proportions, fractals and specific shapes can be seen in the Temple



of Karnak, the Pyramids in Giza, the Parthenon in Greece, the Virupaksha temple in Hampi

Location and orientation also played an important part in sacred architecture. The concept of "Axis Mundi", the point of connection between the celestial and the manifest worlds has been referenced universally. This position was considered the bridge between earth and the sky where the four cardinal directions intersected. In symbolic terms, this served as the umbilicus, or the cosmic navel, depicting the world's origins as well as its centre. This centre served as the focal point believed to allow direct access to a higher plane of existence, the abode of the gods. We see examples of this in the choice of location of Machu Pichu (Peru) and The Dome of the Rock (Jerusalem).

**Ancient architects took inspiration from what they saw around them in the natural world as a model of harmonious perfection, a reflection of the Divine.**

Many ancient cultures also designed their structural plans based on the movement of the heavenly bodies. We can observe the example of the Sun Temple in Machu Pichu which was built such that every year, on the winter solstice the sun's rays would enter through a central window, and fall directly and precisely on a specific ceremonial stone known as the Intihuatana. This showcases their mastery of astronomy together with a deliberate attempt at interacting with the celestial movements. Other examples of similar alignment can be witnessed in Egypt in the Pyramids as well as at Angkor Wat in Cambodia. Scholars such as

Eleanor Mannika (University of Pennsylvania) have proposed that even the measurements of Solar and Lunar time cycles were used to determine the positioning of site of Angkor Wat.



Several other structures are built in specific orientation in relation to the cardinal directions. Choirs in many cathedrals are orientated towards the East. The entrance to the sanctum sanctorum of Zoroastrian temples is always from the East or South. Taking the science of such orientation to another level, we find the ancient Indian system of *Vaastu Shastra* which prescribes the design and organisation of a space in accordance with laws of nature and the position of the constellations.

Perhaps these elements manifest themselves in all things we deem harmonic and beautiful. By using proportions inspired by nature and through the arrangement and order of other elements such as light, space, and location, architects created a sacred space that facilitated the channelling of "subtle vibrational frequencies" that allowed for the opportunity to connect with the divine. American author and lecturer John Anthony West in his documentary *Magical Egypt - An Invisible Science* proposes that these vibrations are the means by which the arts are transmitted to us, through our emotional faculties. For example, music which is transmitted through sound waves uses volume, intonation and intensity to create music which we can 'feel'. Perhaps this is why the great German Poet

Goethe called Architecture "frozen music". Whether it is a great temple or a shopping mall, every edifice communicates its meaning, or lack of meaning, through its vibration. We generally do not associate with it because it is visual vibration communicated through colour, harmony, and proportion. The ancients of various civilisations were evidently aware of this fact.

By using these components of sacred architecture, ancient builders hoped to facilitate the creation of an environment which allowed for and enhanced the ability to connect with the natural, divine laws of life.

In many cases, the design of the sacred complex is itself suggestive of a transformative process expected of the visitor. For instance, the use of *parakrams* at the ancient Meenakshi Temple (Madurai) requires devotees to go through several steps, symbolic of the stages of spiritual evolution that the worshipper must undergo to realize his true self. Only upon passing the last *parakram* does the individual reach the holiest part of the temple. In that sense this ritual is a reflection of man's inner process of learning and purification, leaving behind the temporary self through this long, arduous path, in order to discover his true higher self.

The goal of our lives then is to evolve; to rise and not fall into the traps of the ego of the lower self. Life is therefore a journey in which we each take our own chosen path and travel at our own pace. The purpose of sacred architecture is to help reveal this path, to find, and move towards the Truth. Combining both visible and invisible elements therefore, resulted in harmonic aesthetics and purposeful architectural marvels that served as bridges to help the individual connect the temporary world of form and human experience, to the inspirational world of the eternal laws of life.

Just as each sacred edifice was determined by the laws of life, what if we too could engineer each



aspect of our own lives in alignment with them? If we could live in accordance with laws of nature, wouldn't our bodies too become temples, sacred vehicles, through which to express the best human qualities, devoid of ill thoughts or feelings?

To finish with the words of the modern Sufi Mystic Bawa Muhaiyadeen:

"Since the soul will live eternally, you must strive to build a beautiful house for it, a house which is not subject to time or to external conditions. For this house, you are the engineer, you are the contractor, and you are the architect; you draw the plan and you set up the system. And when all the planning is completed, you are the one who must construct that house. You must build it alone; no one else can build it for you." ★★★

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# SCHEDULE OF PUBLIC EVENTS

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## MEET THE PHILOSOPHERS: CONFUCIUS

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**Saturday, 10th October 2015**

6:00PM (2hrs), FREE ADMISSION

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Chinese philosopher and politician Confucius lived by a strong set of personal, social and governmental ethics. Join us as we explore how his timeless wisdom can help us live a more ethical and meaningful life today.



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## THE HERO'S JOURNEY THROUGH MYTHOLOGY

Lecture

**Saturday, 31st October 2015**

6:00PM (2hrs), FREE ADMISSION

New Acropolis @ **Colaba (Main Center)**

At the heart of the myths and stories of many ancient cultures, we find the idea of the hero's journey. Even today, the concept of super heroes pervades popular culture. Join us as we explore the timeless archetypes of heroes and discover what we have to learn from their inner voyage and battles.



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## VICTORIOUS WARRIOR

Lecture

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6:00PM (2hrs), FREE ADMISSION

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Whether we speak of the Spartans or the Samurai, we find a distinguished warrior spirit cultivated and expressed as expertise on the battlefield. Could their ethos inspire us in our own battles of daily life?



## A NEW RENAISSANCE

Lecture

**Saturday, 31st October 2015**

6:00PM (2hrs), FREE ADMISSION

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Faced with intolerance and fundamentalism in our times, perhaps the real solution lies in giving impetus to a new renaissance. How can we contribute to sustainably make the world a better place?

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## GEOMETRY IN NATURE

Lecture

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6:00PM (2hrs), FREE ADMISSION

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"Look deep into nature and then you will understand everything better," said Albert Einstein. It is suggested that Nature is governed by Laws that can be recognized through the infinite patterns that appear on her canvas. Join us as we understand how the wondrous geometry of nature might give us a glimpse into the inner workings of our own existence.



## MYSTICAL JEWELRY

Lecture

**Saturday, 21st November 2015**

6:00PM (2hrs), FREE ADMISSION

New Acropolis @ **Khar**

The tradition of jewelry in the ancient world seems to have developed into an intricate science, beyond vain decoration, helping the wearer to bridge to the invisible and eternal aspects of life.



## WORLD PHILOSOPHY DAY: REVIVAL OF THE RENAISSANCE

Lecture and Exhibition

**Thursday, 19th November 2015**

7:00PM (2hrs), FREE ADMISSION

The Indian Express Gallery @ **Nariman Point**

In celebration of World Philosophy Day 2015, we shall investigate cycles of human civilizations that blossom in a series of Golden Ages, separated by periods called the Middle Ages. What are the characteristics of the Renaissance period and how can we give birth to a Golden Age in our own times?



## PHILOSOPHY OF ECOLOGY

Seminar

**Sunday, 22nd November 2015**

10:00am (5hrs), FREE ADMISSION

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The gravity of the ecological crisis of our times is perhaps as much a crisis of self-identity for Man. By investigating ancient cultures this seminar will explore the necessary shift in perspective with which we think of ourselves and our world. Consider a role that obligates us as an integral part of Nature, rather than simply fulfilling the need of self-preservation. Optional lunch for Rs. 150. REGISTRATION REQUIRED: [ubai.husein@acropolis.org](mailto:ubai.husein@acropolis.org) / 99200 18204.



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This course establishes the foundation for every aspiring Philosopher by presenting a comparative study of Classical Philosophies, and helping students to develop a sensitivity towards the fundamental Laws that govern Nature and Humanity. In an attempt to preserve this universal heritage, the course serves as an introduction to ancient cultures and investigates the origins of humanity – a time of wonder and mysticism when the invisible world was respected. Course Duration – 16 Sessions. FEES APPLY.



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## SYMBOLISM OF TREES

Lecture

**Saturday, 12th December 2015**  
6:00PM (2hrs), FREE ADMISSION  
New Acropolis @ **Colaba (Main Center)**

Trees are powerful symbols across cultures and play an important role in countless ancient myths. Join us as we explore the deep-rooted symbolism behind these givers of life and what meaning we can draw from their existence.



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## LIVING WITH THE GODS

Lecture

**Saturday, 12th December 2015**  
6:00PM (2hrs), FREE ADMISSION  
New Acropolis @ **Khar**

For what reason has such a vibrant tradition of mythology emerged from civilizations through history? What secrets do they contain that are relevant even today?



## THE MYSTERIES OF THE MAYAN CIVILIZATION

Lecture

**Saturday, 19th December 2015**  
6:00PM (2hrs), FREE ADMISSION  
New Acropolis @ **Colaba (Main Center)**

The ancient Mayans seemed to possess a deep understanding of the inter-relatedness of various aspects of life; man, nature, time, space. Join us as we explore this magnificent culture and discover how we can bring more harmony into the way we live our lives today.

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Hearing the Voice of the Silence (Tibet)  
Harmony (Confucius), Justice (Egypt)  
Nurturing the Soul through Right Education  
Evolution of Consciousness  
The Way of Happiness (Aristotle)  
Types of Governance  
Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato  
Extracting Truth: Myth vs History  
Opportunities of our Times