

Issue No. 35 ■ JULY - AUG ■ 2019

# NewAcropolis

Philosophy and Education for the Future

Bi-Monthly Magazine

**Is it Sustainable  
to be Renewable?**

**The Rise and Decline of  
Wikipedia**

**A Stoic Renaissance**

**An Introduction to  
the Kabbalah**

**PHILOSOPHY  
CULTURE  
SOCIETY  
ESOTERICA  
ART  
AND MORE**







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**NEW ACROPOLIS** is an international organization working in the fields of philosophy, culture and volunteering. Our aim is to revive philosophy as a means of renewal and transformation and to offer a holistic education that can develop both our human potential as well as the practical skills needed in order to meet the challenges of today and to create a better society for the next generation.

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 **Philosophy**  
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NEW ACROPOLIS

# What's Inside

EDITORIAL

04



PHILOSOPHY

A Stoic Renaissance

05



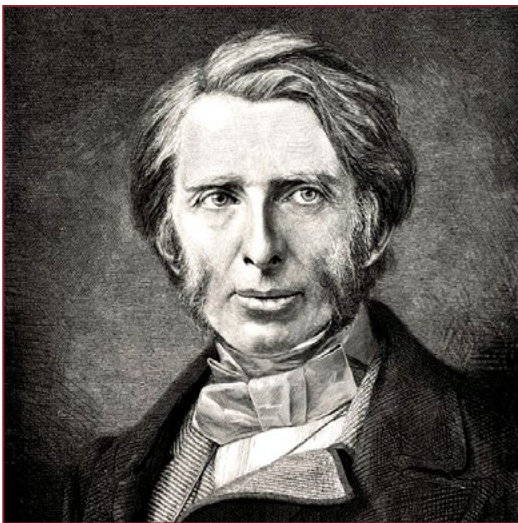
ESOTERICA  
An Introduction to  
the Kabbalah

10



SOCIETY  
The Rise and  
Decline of  
Wikipedia

08



ART

John Ruskin :  
Lover of Beauty

12

CULTURE  
Music, Society, Spirit

14



SCIENCE & NATURE  
Is it Sustainable to  
be Renewable?

16

MYTHS OF THE WORLD  
The Ramayana

18





# Editorial

## A Systemic View of Education

It is interesting to look at the education system as a *system* and to compare the 'systemic' and the 'reductionist' points of view. From the reductionist point of view, a whole is the sum of its parts and in order to address problems, the parts need to be studied separately and 'fixed'. Looking at the education system, we can easily see that problems have been dealt with in this traditional way: a 'fix the parts' approach with changes to the curriculum or assessment procedures; or a 'fix the people' approach where the focus was on staff training and professional development; and a 'fix the school' approach where 'failing' schools were made to improve. However, experience has shown that trying to tackle symptoms alone has not been successful and that the education system is in a bigger crisis than before. The evidence for this crisis is widespread: employers and universities are complaining about a lack of skills and resilience in young people; teachers are leaving the profession in ever greater numbers and the rates of depression and anxiety among teenagers have increased by 70% (!) in the past 25 years, with mounting evidence that the school system is contributing to this mental health crisis.

On the other hand, according to the systemic view, a system is a complex *whole* where the whole is more than the sum of its parts. There is a synergy that can only be explained in its totality. All the elements are organized for a common purpose and all the parts are interconnected and interdependent. Every problem will affect the whole system and it follows that the cause of a problem lies within the whole system and not in one of its parts. In other words, the cause of a systemic problem is not the 'mistake' of any individual or a particular part but is inherent within the system. Therefore, the starting point for addressing problems has to be the total system.

How is it possible to solve problems with a systemic perspective? According to systems scientists, we need to look into systemic structures to reveal the underlying forces and the interactions between these forces. Peter Senge advocates looking even deeper to the mental models that underlie systemic structures. Mental models are shaped by values, beliefs and attitudes, and on an even deeper level they rest ultimately on certain philosophical assumptions about the nature of reality,

the nature of the human being and how the world works. It is remarkable how many matters that might be deemed purely practical depend in fact on profound philosophical issues.

Every system is specifically designed for a certain purpose and the education system is designed to provide education. However, here lies the crux. Teachers, parents, students, local councils, governmental policies, business requirements and market forces are all tied together in a web of relationships for the purpose of education. But would they all agree on the purpose of education? According to Schools Minister Nick Gibb, education is the 'engine of our economy', business wants well trained people 'to do the job', schools want academic excellence to boost their standing in league tables, many parents want to set up their children for life. And what about young people – what do they want? They might be searching for purpose and meaning and not want to be considered as tools of the system and cogs in the wheel...

One of the major systemic problems is that different underlying views regarding the purpose of education are 'pulling the system apart' and making the task for teachers very hard indeed. Most teachers want to value the whole child and enable them to unfold their unique individual potential. However, as a reaction to the first PISA study by the OECD, governments around the world have started to push for better outcomes in order to become more competitive in the international rankings. At the same time, governments are responding to the mounting mental health crisis amongst young people and teachers are caught between opposing demands.

By focussing too much on academic achievement, the focus of education becomes very narrow and only the academic part of a child is seen and valued. But what about the rest? Is the purpose of education to develop the whole potential of each child, to optimise academic outcomes or to prepare young people for the job market? What is the purpose of education? The answer to this question is inextricably linked to our concept of the human being. Only a truly philosophical examination of this topic will provide us with the necessary clarity and understanding to address the current problems of our education system. And probably all other problems too.

*Sabine Leitner*

# A STOIC RENAISSANCE

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In a brightly painted portico, or colonnaded walk – the *Stoa* – the philosopher Zeno used to pace vigorously up and down, delivering his “Stoic” teachings to whoever cared to come and listen, in the Athens of around 300 BC.

He exhorted his listeners not to follow the way of the world, which calls some things “good” and others “bad”, but rather to look within themselves and only follow what is eternally good – virtue and wisdom – and to reject what is

eternally bad – ignorance and injustice.

So began the phenomenon of Stoicism, a philosophy which spread from Greece to Rome, where it became the quintessential ideology of that tough and hardy people. Later it inspired Boethius, at the beginning of the Dark Ages, to write his *Consolation of Philosophy* from his prison cell, as he awaited his execution at the command of the Ostrogothic king, Theodoric the Great.

Its influence continued down the centuries until today. It is now experiencing a revival, after it was discovered that it had been a major influence on the development of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT).

It is interesting that a philosophy that developed over 2000 years ago in ancient Greece is still highly valued for its practical efficacy today, in a very different world. Thousands of people still respond to the hard-hitting, but helpful teachings of such writers as Musonius Rufus, Seneca, Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius.

In this article I would like to take some examples from the teachings of Marcus Aurelius, a Roman emperor, and Epictetus, a slave. Men of totally unequal backgrounds, yet who shared the same philosophy of life.

The writings of Marcus Aurelius – found in the *Meditations*, the only book he ever wrote – exude a wonderful sense of brotherly love for humanity and the feeling of being an integral part of Nature and the Universe, which is seen as a coherent and



intelligent whole. The second chapter of his book begins with the following piece of advice:

“Begin each day by telling yourself: today I shall be meeting with interference, ingratitude, insolence, disloyalty, and selfishness – all of them due to the offenders’ ignorance of what is good or evil. But for my part I have long perceived the nature of good and its nobility, the nature of evil and its meanness, and also the nature of the culprit himself, who is my brother (not in the physical sense, but as a fellow creature similarly endowed with reason and a share of the divine); therefore none of those things can injure me, for nobody can implicate me in what is degrading. Neither can I be angry with my brother or fall foul of him; for he and I were born to work together, like a man’s two hands, feet, or eyelids, or like the upper and lower rows of his teeth. To obstruct each other is against Nature’s law – and what is irritation or aversion but a form of obstruction?” (Penguin Classics, 1974)

It is a technique well worth trying out whenever you have an interpersonal problem. It begins on a realistic note: this is the situation, this is how it is. It then proceeds to the understanding that the offender is not deliberately evil, merely misguided. But every human being, he says has a spark of reason and a share of the divine, and in the light of that it is always possible to work with others, accepting differences as positive rather than



The Stoics believed in something they called Concordia (concord or harmony) which means all hearts united together in natural affection.

negative, and learning the art of cooperation, as nature wisely shows us.

In this regard, one of the main Stoic concepts was Concordia – *Concord* – which means all hearts united together in natural affection, one of the great Stoic ideals.

In another passage, Marcus Aurelius writes: “Whatever is in harmony with Thee, O Universe is in harmony with me.” It is this conception which is at the root of the Stoic doctrine of acceptance. It is not a mere stolid acquiescence in the dictates of fate, but a belief, founded on the Stoics’ observation of nature, that Nature, or the Universe, is a wisely and benevolently coordinated whole. In such a complex organism, unmitigated pleasure cannot be the lot of every being, all of the time. It is the well-being of the whole that is sought, on the principle that “What is good for the hive is good for the bee” (another saying of Marcus Aurelius). It leads to an attitude of willing acceptance of those aspects of our lives that are beyond our control.

Which brings us neatly on to Epictetus. He opens his *Manual for Living* with the following clear statement:

“Happiness and freedom begin with a clear understanding of one principle: some things are within our control, and some things are not. It is only after you have faced up to this fundamental rule and learned to distinguish between what you can and can’t control that inner tranquillity and outer effectiveness become possible. Within



our control are our own opinions, aspirations, desires and the things that repel us. These areas are quite rightly our concern, because they are directly subject to our influence. We always have a choice about the contents and character of our inner lives. Outside our control, however, are such things as what kind of body we have, whether we're born into wealth or strike it rich, how we are regarded by others, and our status in society. We must remember that those things are externals and are therefore not our concern. Trying to control or change what we can't only results in torment. Remember: the things within our power are naturally at our disposal, free from any restraint or hindrance; but those things outside our power are weak, dependent, or determined by whims and actions of others. Remember, too, that if you think that you have free rein over things that are naturally beyond your control or if you attempt to adopt the affairs of others as your own, your pursuits will be thwarted and you will become a frustrated, anxious, and fault-finding person." (HarperCollins Publishers, 1994)

Again, this does not mean to relinquish responsibility for all external matters, such as health, wealth and well-being. It is based on a

clear conception of what is truly good and bad, rather than the appearances of those attributes. "Death, for instance," says Epictetus elsewhere, "is not terrible, else it would have appeared so to Socrates." But most people today do regard death as an evil to be avoided at all costs, even though it obviously can't be. For the Stoics, it is neither evil nor good, but "indifferent", and it is our attitude towards it that is all-important. The essential thing is not whether we live or die, but how we do so, with dignity and nobility of heart, or without such qualities. And this, said both Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius, depends entirely on us. As Confucius said in a similar context, "What has this to do with others?"

Let us hope that this Stoic renaissance continues to thrive, so that – just as Stoicism reformed the Roman Empire with its doctrines and, in the words of Ernest Renan, gave rise to "the most beautiful chapter in the history of mankind" – so may we, the new renaissance Stoics, have a similar effect on the world of which we are the global citizens today.

*Julian Scott*



# The Rise and Decline of Wikipedia

Since its launch in 2001, Wikipedia, the multilingual online encyclopaedia, has grown incredibly and become one of the most important information sources on the Internet. In 2015, there were more than 40 million articles in 301 different languages and it had reached 18 billion page views and nearly 500 million unique visitors per month. However, the strength of this web-based model founded on the principle of open collaboration is also its weakness.

A recent essay by Romans Emanuele Mastrangelo and Enrico Petrucci focuses on the free encyclopaedia and the hegemony of information. The authors claim that one of the greatest features of Wikipedia is that anyone can contribute to it. As a result, the circulation of knowledge is no

longer in the hands of a small circle of people but is within everyone's reach. Compared to the classical encyclopaedias, Wikipedia is limitless and easy to use and that is why it became more successful than other platforms, which were targeting the same aim: to create a huge source of online information data. It also gained a reputation for reliability, because of its neutral point of view (including the citation of sources). The published information was edited and controlled by a group of administrators, who carried out quality checks.

But the problem was that no one controlled the controllers. And what made it less and less appetising for newcomers was the high rate of rejections and especially the automated algorithm



# WIKIPEDIA



that was implemented due to the heavy traffic and the growing demand for contributions. The tool made to reject undesirable contributions was efficient, but it soon turned out to be very mechanical and impersonal, so in the end it discouraged editors from taking part.

After the dynamic initial growth there was a crackdown in 2007 and, since then, the number of contributors to the English Wikipedia, especially new ones, has been declining. By 2014, the number of editors for the English-language version had fallen by a third, from 50,000 to 30,000. Now, there are just over 10,000 active contributors in total. During the same time, the non-English Wikipedia was still flourishing and its numbers remained relatively constant.

The reason for this is that it has become more and more difficult to get into the inner circle of Wikipedia editors. Though Wikipedia works in a democratic way and is fully funded by donations from all over the world, its system is rigid and not adaptive to changes. So, as with all companies that become large in a relatively short period of time, Wikipedia has to cope with the problem of its bureaucratic structure. And, while it strictly assesses the content that newcomers bring, it does not really check the contributions of the inner circle, the administrators, who actually create the approach of the page. It can lead to a biased point of view, which is in contradiction with the principle of neutrality. The lower number of newcomers means fewer contributions and the absence of a new generation that can take over the task of the modern encyclopaedist.

But the decline of the site does not come only from within, but from without as well. Many countries, especially anti-democratic ones, often block those contents that displease them, as happens in Venezuela, Turkey or, more recently, China. While Beijing used to selectively block some pages that were politically sensitive (like the Tiananmen Square protests), they have now changed their

approach and have decided to block the whole site, regardless of the language.

This means that to reach a wide spectrum of the public is getting more and more challenging. The spread of fake news can also undermine the authenticity of Wikipedia. In the age of information wars, where people are well-connected and news can easily travel from one point to another, the flourishing of unreal or created information (often boosted by governments) has led to confusion and



doubts as to the validity of the sources. Even in Wikipedia, where the editors have to double-check the information, they are faced with the difficulty of discerning what is authentic information and banning those accounts from which people want to mislead readers. Wikipedia, which was a success story in the early part of the new millennium, is now stagnating and needs a new strategy to remain the last bastion of free and honest information worldwide.

*Istvan Orban*

# An Introduction to the Kabbalah\*

The Kabbalah is the great *gnosis* of the Mediterranean World. It is a universal and synthetic form of gnosis (i.e. *higher knowledge*, from the Sanskrit *jnana* and the Greek *gnōsis*).

The term Kabbalah means “to receive” and “to

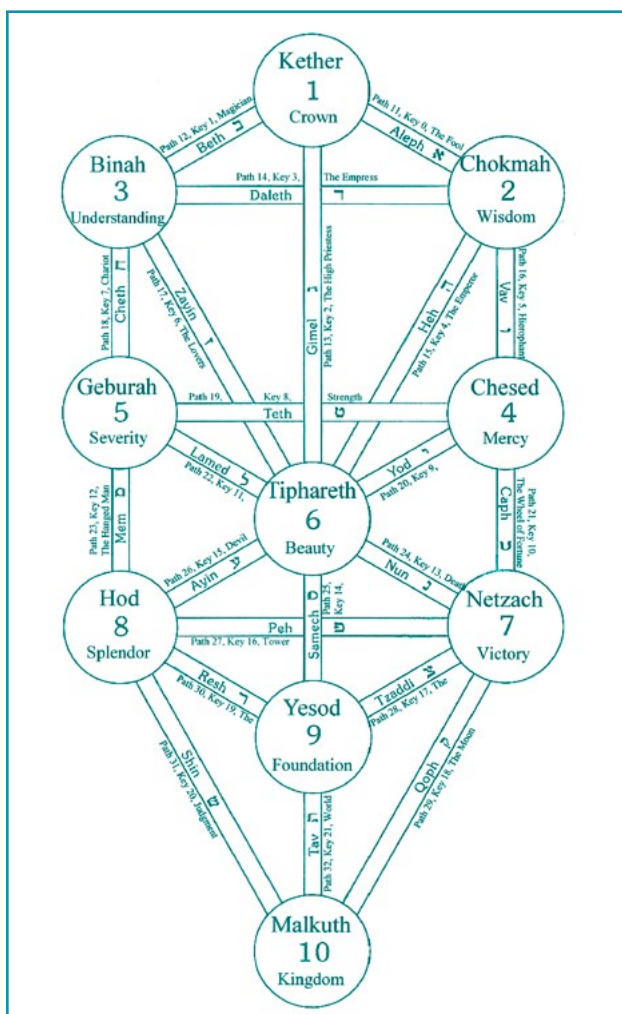
transmit”, hence the allusion to a form of esoteric knowledge which is transmitted “from mouth to ear” or “from heart to mind”. It mainly refers to an unwritten tradition passed down from one generation of initiates to another in an unbroken chain.

According to traditional belief, early kabbalistic knowledge was transmitted orally by the patriarchs (the prophets and sages of Israel), eventually to be interwoven into Jewish religious writings and culture.

Written records of this transmission are to be found in two important works: the *Sefer Yetzirah* or “Book of Formation (or Creation)” and the *Zohar* or “Book of Splendour”.

Historically, the oldest traces of the Kabbalah can be found in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, especially in some interpretations of the written *Torah* (also known as the *Pentateuch* or the *Five Books of Moses*). At that time Kabbalah was born as a means of providing an esoteric interpretation of the *Torah*. And it is in this sense that we can identify it as a Jewish *gnosis*, even though the true character of Kabbalah is much more universal, because its principles include many aspects of both exoteric and esoteric knowledge: from mathematics to physics, through medicine, religion, astronomy, astrology and alchemy, etc.

The fundamental doctrines of Kabbalah can be applied analogically to the evolution of man, planet, solar system, or galaxy, hence its universality.



The Kabbalistic Tree of Life



Any manifestation and experience of life can be synthesised through kabbalistic methods. There is not a single human experience, philosophical speculation or religious principle that does not find a place within what has been called “the kabbalistic palace”. This symbolic palace is made up of four worlds: *Atziluth* (divine world), *Ber'iah* (mental), *Yetzirah* (astral) and *Assiah* (material).

The symbol par excellence of each and every possible kabbalistic speculation is that of the *Tree of Life*. On it rests, for instance, the doctrine of emanation. This teaching describes in pictorial fashion a tree formed of ten emanations (known as *Sefirot*) issuing forth from the boundless dimension (*Ein Sof*). The Sefirot represents the Jewish way of describing the various aspects of universal manifestation.

Another important feature of the Kabbalah is its capacity for synthesis. Despite having developed in a well-defined Jewish cultural context, the Kabbalah has been able to absorb all the other major spiritual teachings that it has encountered during its historical development. During this process the Kabbalah has been able to purify this knowledge and to ‘give’ it back to the world in an absolutely objective form. In the West and in the Mediterranean basin in particular, where the division between religious and esoteric teachings developed into a complete schism, most of the esoteric knowledge that survived has managed to find ‘refuge’ in the Kabbalah.

### How can we approach the Kabbalah?

Its forms are different according to the context in which they are applied. For example, we have: a **literal Kabbalah**, which can serve as the exegesis for a sacred text like the *Torah*. We have a **philosophical Kabbalah** which reflects on the ultimate problems of life, the human being and the universe. There is also a **mystical Kabbalah** (known as “the way of the chariot” or *Merkabah*), which treats of the soul’s ascent to the heavenly realms through mystical contemplation, and a **magical-operative Kabbalah**

(partly known as *Ma’asit* or *practical Kabbalah*).

Through the correct use of the mind, the Kabbalist magician tries to come into direct contact with the living forces of the universe. As he learns *to operate* (to act) in harmony with nature and all its forces, he becomes a co-creator of the Divine Plan.

In recent centuries, Kabbalistic masters and their teachings have operated within alchemical, Masonic and Rosicrucian circles. From this interaction, the main nucleus of the magical-operative Kabbalah has developed. This line of transmission can be identified by following the works of various “occult” figures such as: Pico della Mirandola, John Dee, Raimon Lull, Eliphas Levi, Martinez de Pasqually, up to the founders of the Order of the Golden Dawn in England.

*Agostino Dominici*

\* This article summarises some of the teachings given by Giorgio Rossi (Perugia, Italy) plus my own research into, and reflections on this vast topic.





# *John Ruskin*

## *Lover of Beauty*

Tolstoy described Ruskin as “...one of the most remarkable men, not only of England and our time, but of all countries and all times. He was one of those rare men who think with their hearts, and so he thought and said not only what he himself had seen and felt, but what everyone will think and say in the future.”

This year is the bicentenary of the birth of John Ruskin, Victorian writer, artist, art critic and social reformer; although, after a century

and a half, it seems that his voice could rise again as fresh and provocative as it once did in the past, just as Tolstoy had foretold.

He certainly stirred up the times in which he lived and influenced many great people like Gandhi. He was swimming against the current. “I suppose that one reason why I am so fond of fish (as creatures, I mean, not as eating) is that they always swim with their heads against the stream. I find it for me the healthiest position.”

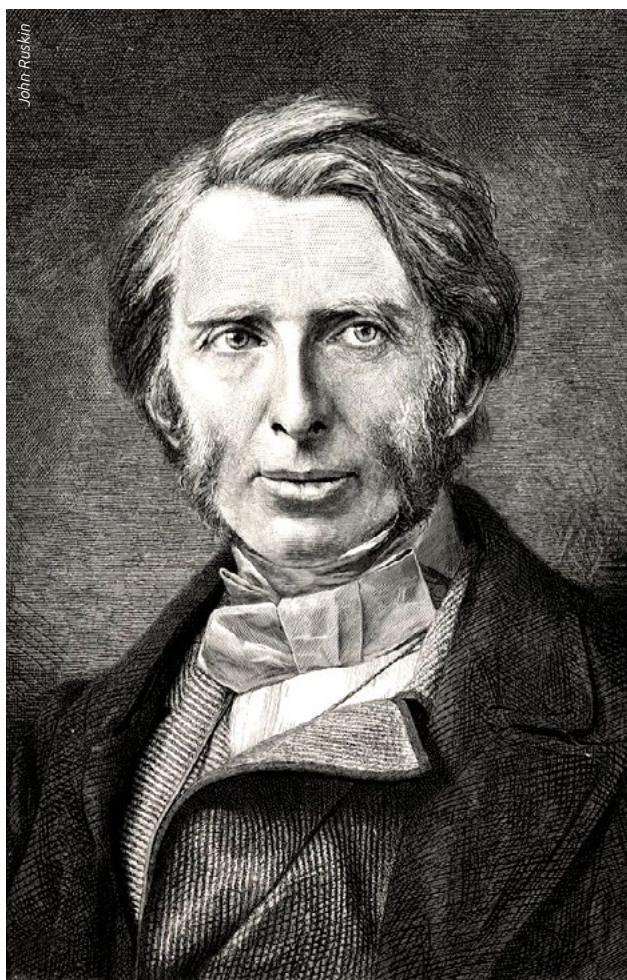


John Ruskin, View of Amalfi



Ruskin was born in London in 1819 into a wealthy family. His father was a wine merchant who made a fortune in the sherry trade. As a part of a newly rich middle class he would travel widely around Britain and during his teens would go every year on long tours of France, Switzerland, and Italy. On these travels he encountered the glorious past of many medieval and renaissance cities, but most notably he fell in love with Venice on his first visit when he was 16. He called Venice “the paradise of cities”.

His message was to connect with and appreciate the beauty that surrounds us. The function of art was to support that. His mission was to open people’s eyes to the beautiful. But he soon realized that to bring about a change one has to act politically. As a result, he travelled widely around the country giving speeches calling upon people to become



social reformers and lecturing as an early critic of modern capitalism. His frequent travels opened his mind and eyes, and in the midst of the industrial revolution he could see the collapse of the intrinsic human values. The fate of industrial cities and their inhabitants was a sign of decline, not of progress. The disappearance of beauty was the twilight of the world, which was becoming less human.

The intellectual and wealthy elite expected Ruskin to write about art, which he did, but he also had a far-sighted vision, saying that if society is founded on structures of inequality and profit-driven heartlessness, then it is deprived of beauty, which for him is the heart of life and art. To be able to bring culture back to people we need to have an ethical form of work. His fight was not about the class system, but about ethical and moral values within society.

Of course he was a human being with many flaws, but his message is as relevant today as it was a hundred fifty years ago, possibly even more so now as we are facing a huge crisis in society, in an environment which is collapsing under the weight of capitalistic-driven businesses and a consumer society blind to beauty. These are harsh words, but this is what he most feared that the world would become. His credo was simple and modest, “there is no wealth but life.”

To end with, here are a few of his quotes:

**“Quality is never an accident; it is always the result of intelligent effort.”**

**“The purest and most thoughtful minds are those which love colour the most.”**

**“Fine art is that in which the hand, the head, and the heart of man go together.”**

*Miha Kosir*

# Music, Society, Spirit



**F**or many people living in the Western world today, the idea of 'music' refers to a very particular pop sound that emanates from various screens, devices and advertisements.

It is a kind of mishmash of musical tropes, hoovered up from the mid to latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (*hip-hop, disco, punk, gangsta rap, stadium rock, grunge, electro, etc...*) souped-up and reworked into an array of largely similar sounding hits. It is technology-aided songwriting underpinned by a robust marketing structure that facilitates the transition from studio floor to mainstream airwaves and determines most of what we are likely to hear going about our daily lives. There are of course notable exceptions but, whether YouTube sensation, indie



***“To the ancient Hindus as to the Chinese, audible sound was thought capable not only of influencing the mind and emotions of man, but literally of shaping and changing physical events taking place within the world.”***

band or pop star, music today is predominately a product rather than an art.

The phenomenon of ‘the millennial whoop’, originally coined by music blogger Patrick Metzger in 2016, is a musical phrase that moves from the 5<sup>th</sup> note of a scale to the 3<sup>rd</sup> note and back again, in a kind of ‘wah oh wah oh’ motion. Consisting of only two notes, it means that it can’t be owned, leaving songwriters and producers free to use the catchy phrase over and over again in a whooping win-win situation that seems to popularise a song whenever it is used.

‘Timbre’, meaning the musical quality or type of sound(s) in a piece, including textural depth and tonal range, has also been drastically reduced compared to 50/60 years ago, with many songs now being compiled using four instruments, namely, keyboard, drum machine, sampler and synthesiser. Increasingly rare are pianos, violins, harps, sitars, djembes, triangles, xylophones, gongs or even guitars. From today’s vantage point, even the post-classical artists of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, Beatles, Bowie, etc., appear to hail from a mythological musical age of great ones. With seemingly so much more choice at our fingertips, our real musical options appear to have narrowed.

However, if we delve back even further to the reaches of an ancient past, we find an understanding of music completely unrecognisable from that of today or the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, with implications that are nothing short of drastic.

In a whistle-stop physics lesson, music is made up of sound and sound is a vibration. Light too is a vibration and all the things that light touches also have their vibration. The author David Tame writes in his book “The

Secret Power of Music’, “To the ancient Hindus as to the Chinese, audible sound was thought capable not only of influencing the mind and emotions of man, but literally of shaping and changing physical events taking place within the world”, adding that “[it was believed] sounds accomplished this by gradually altering the non-physical vibrating patterns which lay at the root of all objects.”

If we follow this basically scientific idea, then the music that we create and surround ourselves with goes to the deepest, innermost root of what it is that we are and to a certain extent affects all events in our lives.

As creatures of habit, we tend to like routines, the familiar things that make us feel safe and secure. In a chaotic world, the millennial whoop, limited tonal range and repetitive melodies have become a codified way of saying, this is safe, no challenges here, carry on as you were. However, if collectively we want to change the way we live, into a more harmonious form of existence which is so desperately needed now, then it might be that we also need to quite literally change our tune and the music that we surround ourselves with. The finest ideas and the finest music will exalt our troubles and resonate with our most altruistic ambitions. Music which is ultimately good for us doesn’t create destructive feelings, fears or ideas of separation, rather it encourages in us a kind of benevolence, an attunement to beauty and joyfulness. According to the Sufi Mystic Hazrat Inayat Khan, “music and nature both work together, for they are one.”

*Siobhan Farrar*

# Is it sustainable to be renewable?

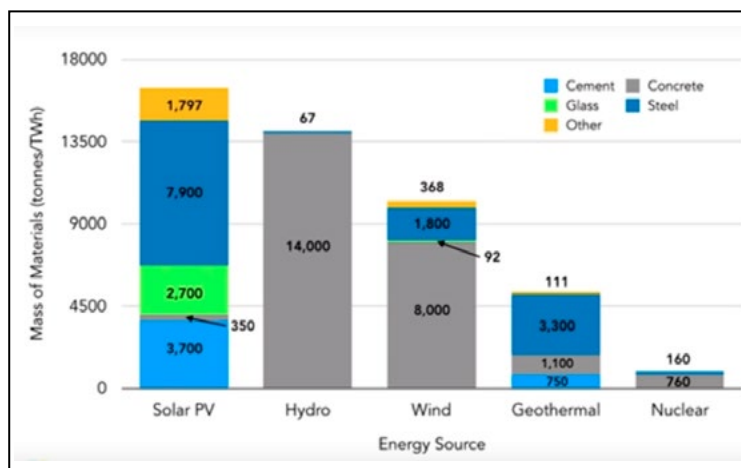
In our politico-ecological context it is always nice to talk about generating renewable energy. But we often forget to look at the bigger picture: how is it made? How is it integrated into its environment? And how will it end? All those questions are often omitted or quickly overlooked.

It is undeniable that our thirst for energy, especially in the form of electricity, has more than doubled since 1990. We now consume over 20 Peta Watt hour or PWh (just add 15 zeros after the 20...) of electricity worldwide; as a reference, the UK only consumes 0,3 PWh a year, which is just about 1% of the global demand. Almost 65% of that electricity is generated by fossil fuels, 10% is from nuclear fission and the rest is from renewable energies: solar, wind, hydroelectric, biomass and biofuel.

I will not argue about our desperate need to get rid of all types of fossil fuel-based energy sources,







but there is something to say about what types of sources we should replace them with and which ones are actually viable and sustainable. Not many people are aware of the great quantity of material needed to build a photovoltaic panel or a wind turbine, let alone the impressive amount of concrete necessary to build a water dam for a hydroelectric power plant, as concrete production alone is responsible for 8% of global CO2 emissions.

Aside from the negative environmental impact of renewable energies such as solar or wind farms on endangered bird populations, we also have to consider the impact on

human life. Scientists have now estimated the number of deaths due to air pollution that can be attributed to each energy source (See Table 1 below).

Regarding the life expectancy of the machines or structures used to harvest and transform the different primary energy sources into electricity, renewable energies still have a long way to go before they can match the longevity of traditional power plants. Solar panels for example last up to 25-30 years but the electronics used to transform the energy from the Photovoltaic cell to the grid is more fragile and doesn't last as long. And even if solar panels have improved in their efficiency

it will still take a few years before they can start giving back more than the energy that was used to make them.

There is still a CO2 emission-free source of energy that we haven't mentioned yet, nuclear power. The stigma attached to nuclear power is strong in our consciousness, and Chernobyl and Fukushima have not helped. However, it is still the safest and most sustainable source of electricity production. With proper waste management and recycling, nuclear generation is perfectly sustainable and will only generate low level radiation waste which can be stored and managed safely, if sufficient funds and investments are made. But the future of nuclear is not necessarily in fission but fusion...

In conclusion, we can say that jumping on the renewable bandwagon is not as straightforward as we think. Suppressing fossil fuel power plants just to replace them with renewables is not viable, nor sustainable; however, they can provide an efficient way to produce electricity in certain areas of the globe. There must be a reliable and efficient way to generate the basic energy needs that our modern societies require. But ultimately, we must ask ourselves the question about the real need to consume so much energy.

*Florimond Krins*

Energy Source	Mortality rate [Deaths/ Trillion Watt Hour]	Percentage of energy usage
Biofuel/Biomass	24,000	21% of total energy
Coal	100,000	41% of electricity
Hydro	1,400	6% of electricity
Natural Gaz	4,000	22% of electricity
Nuclear	90	11% of electricity
Oil	36,000	19% of electricity, 33% of total energy
Solar (roof tops)	440	less than 1% of electricity
Wind	150	2% of electricity

*Table 1: the death rate per Trillion (or Tera) Watt Hour or TWh<sup>3</sup>*

# THE RAMAYANA



Rama (right) seated on the shoulders of Hanuman,  
battles the demon-king Ravana

Ancient India, just like Ancient Greece, gave birth to two great epics: The Ramayana and The Mahabharata. The former is older and describes the adventures of a prince banished from his country and wandering for 14 long years in the wilderness of Southern India. Indeed, the story shares a lot in common with the Odyssey. In both epics, we see the main characters on a journey full of arduous trials, leading them to self-discovery and self-mastery. In both, they need to conquer formidable enemies before being granted a safe return home. In both, the hero's struggle becomes a tug of war between good and evil forces, where victory depends on their perseverance and virtue.

The Hindu festival "Diwali" is celebrated every autumn. Diwali symbolises the spiritual "victory of light over darkness, good over evil and knowledge over ignorance" and commemorates the safe return of Prince Rama, his wife Sita and Rama's brother, Lakshman, after their exile. The festival is so embedded in the British calendar of events that in most primary schools children hear the Story of Rama and Sita – in other words, the popularized shortened version of the Ramayana.

The story begins with a short introduction of the two powerful races of Northern India, the Kosalas and the Videhas. The alliance between these two families was formed when Rama, the eldest son of King Dasa-ratha, won king Janak's eldest daughter, Sita, for his wife. Many happy years passed before King Dasa-ratha decided it was time to appoint Rama as his successor. Nevertheless, no sooner had the preparations for the coronation begun than the old king fell victim to an intrigue by his second wife. The Queen demanded that her son, Bharat, should become king whilst Rama should be banished from the city for 14 years. Incomprehensible as it might seem to a modern reader, the old king gave in to this demand, seeing it as a punishment



for a crime he had committed as a youth.

Rama is accompanied into exile by his faithful wife, Sita, and his loyal brother, Lakshman. They cross many rivers, always heading south. As soon as they settle into their peaceful forest life, the moment of a great trial arrives. The land of southern India is terrorised by Ravana, the Demon King, ruling from Sri Lanka. He finds out about beautiful Sita living in the forest and, immediately, an irresistible desire to possess her takes hold of him. He kidnaps her and keeps her captive on a distant island. Distraught Rama decides to find his beloved wife and defeat the demon. And so he does, with the help of the Vanars, a tribe of forest men often referred to as 'monkeys', and their most courageous general, Hanuman. Rama, favoured by Gods, wins a victory over the evil sorcerers

from Lanka and makes his journey back home to the delight of his loving subjects.

The authorship of the original poem is attributed to a sage and an anchorite Valmiki, who makes a brief appearance in the story himself. By tradition the text belongs to the Treta Yuga, when the power of humans started to diminish as people grew more materialistic and less inclined towards spirituality. However, the Ramayana continues to inspire readers, artists and filmmakers of today. It is a masterpiece which touches upon soft and deep emotions present in our everyday life and holding the world together. It is a story of unconditional love and sacrifice, of devotion and loyalty beyond compare, of divine wisdom and infinite potential in every human being. It is a dream that may still come true...

*Ania Hajost*



