

■ Issue No. 42 ■ SEP - OCT ■ 2020

NewAcropolis

Philosophy and Education for the Future

**The Philosophy of
Climbing**

**The Magical Function of
Rituals and Ceremonies**

Aesthetic Intelligence

Acupuncture

PHILOSOPHY

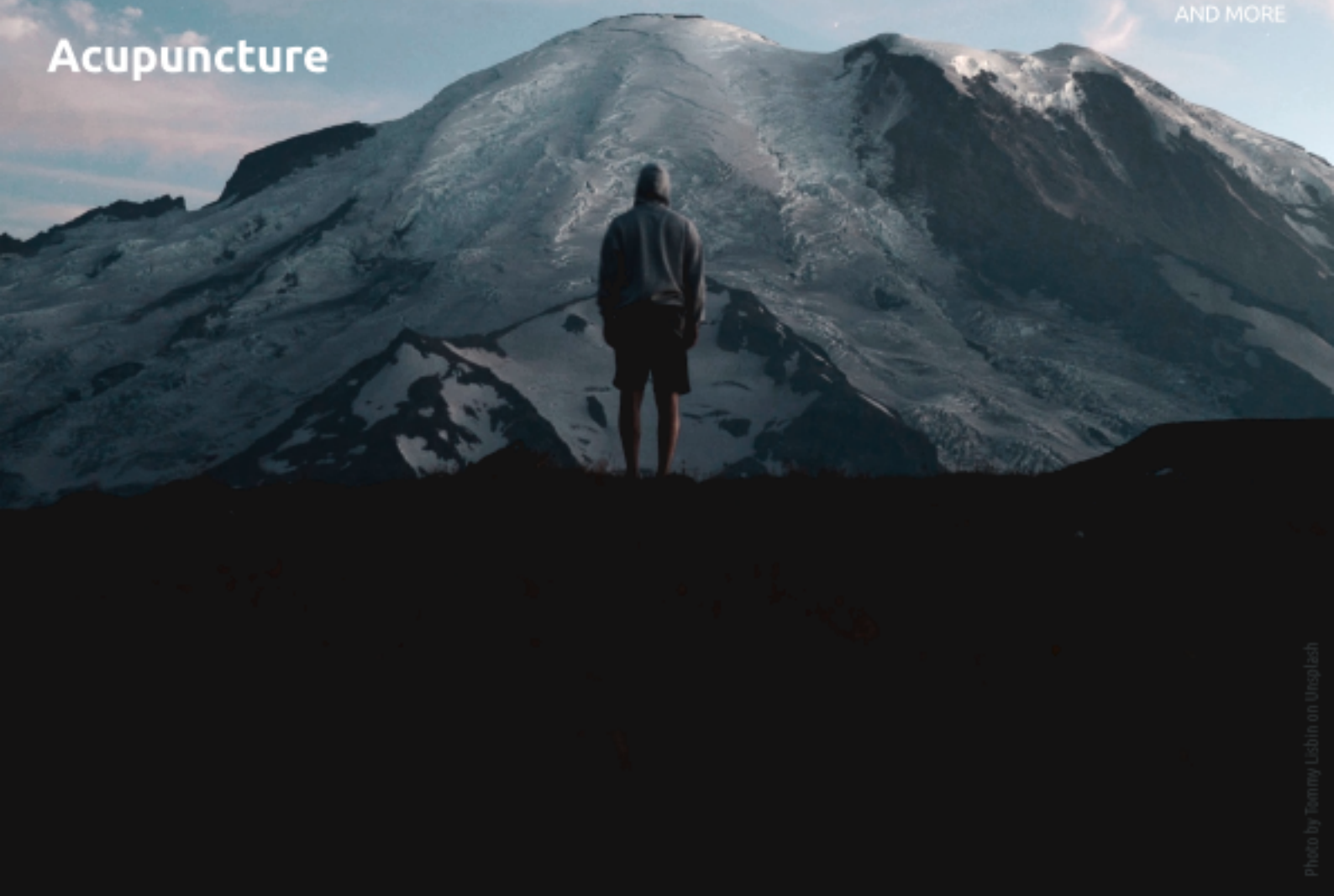
CULTURE

SOCIETY

ESOTERICA

ART

AND MORE



16-WEEK COURSE

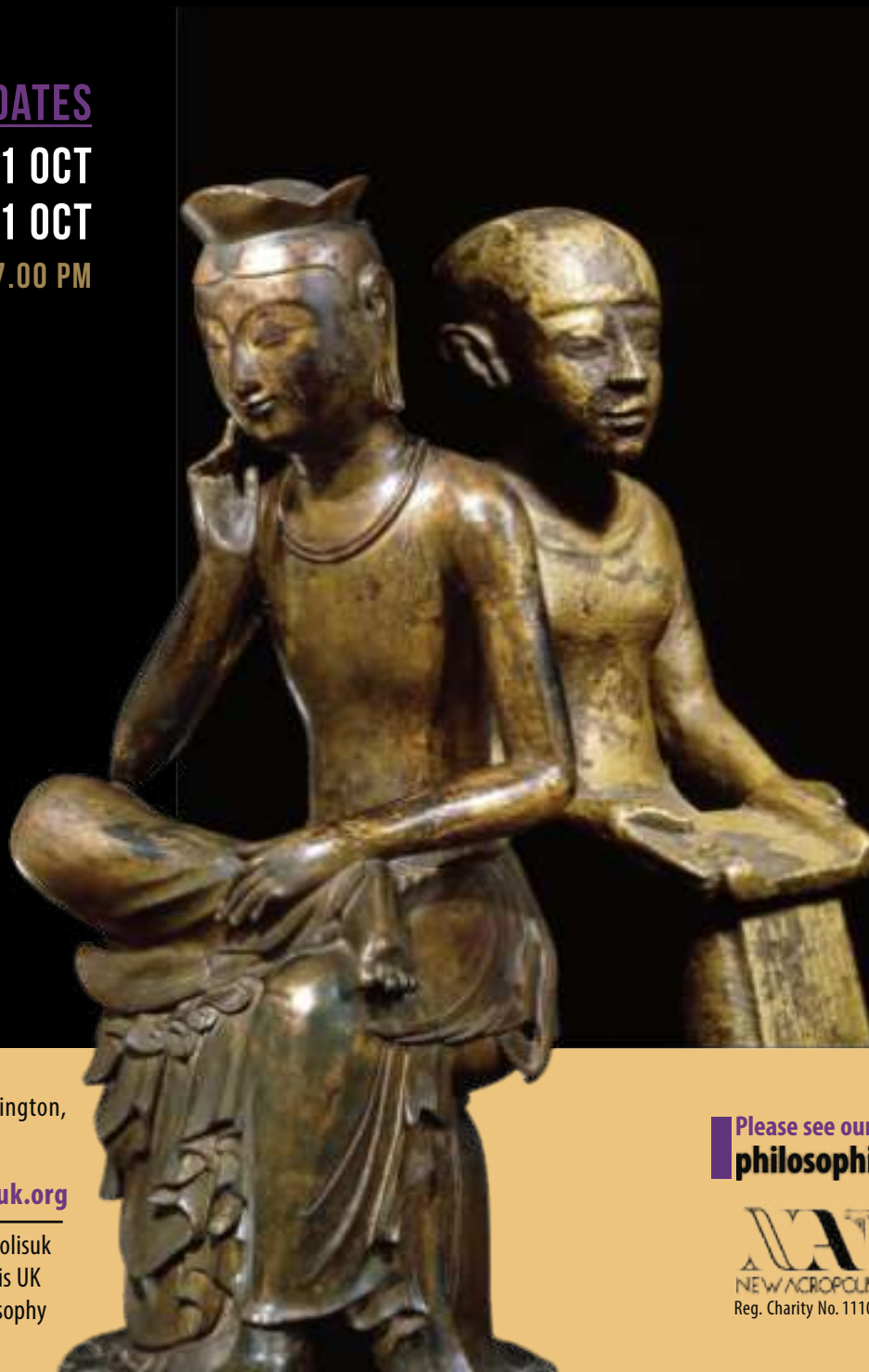
PHILOSOPHIES OF EAST AND WEST

STARTING DATES

THURS 01 OCT

WED 21 OCT

ALL STARTING AT 7.00 PM



ABOUT THE COURSE

Philosophy means love of wisdom (philo-sophia) and it is essentially an active attitude of awareness towards life. In this sense, we are all born philosophers, with an innate need to ask questions and with the intuition that there are answers to be found.

This 16-week course will introduce you to the major concepts of Eastern and Western Philosophy and explore their relevance and practical application for our lives.

Every civilisation has passed on to us its experience and understanding of life. However, most of us have only a basic knowledge of philosophy and have had little opportunity to learn about the vast heritage of ideas that have inspired and guided humanity throughout history.

The introductory evening will be via Zoom, but the full course will be held at our premises in Islington, subject to government restrictions.

Fees for the course are £190 (£130 concessions) inclusive of all hand-outs and printed material.

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Meetup: Practical Philosophy
of East and West

Please see our website for more details :
philosophiesofeastandwest.org

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Culture
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NEW ACROPOLIS

Philosophy and Education for the Future

About Us

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.

For further details please visit :
WWW.NEWACROPOLISUK.ORG

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 **Philosophy**
Culture
Volunteering
NEW ACROPOLIS

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Editorial

Why philosophy matters in times of crisis

We seem to be living more and more in times of permanent crisis: terrorism, armed conflicts, unprecedented waves of desperate refugees, crises in practically every field of public life, including financial and economic, environmental, political, cultural, educational, institutional, (mental) health, etc. There is hardly any area which is not affected by some crisis in one form or another. The very term 'crisis' conjures up feelings of danger, threat and panic and urges us to act as quickly as possible. Taking time to think seems to be a luxury of the past and not something we can afford now.

To a certain extent, this is true. In moments of emergency, we do need to act quickly and don't have much time to think. But it is also precisely in these moments that our habits of thinking are revealed and exposed and show their true nature. Our actions are generally a reflection of our thoughts, mindsets, beliefs – whether conscious or unconscious – and sometimes it is our way of thinking that has brought about the crisis in the first place. As Einstein famously said: "The world we have created is a product of our thinking, we cannot change it without changing the way we think." Once we see where our thinking went wrong, we are able to correct it.

A crisis also forces us to examine our assumptions. It makes us question our way of life and reflect on what needs to change in order to achieve different outcomes. It highlights what is really important and of value to us. Philosophy helps us to reframe our questions and to find new perspectives. Philosophy not only teaches us how to think and reflect but it also puts us in contact with the wisdom that has been passed down to us for many centuries and already stood the test of time. Unlike information, knowledge or technology, wisdom does not become obsolete and insights into universal principles and understanding the interconnectedness of all things are more relevant than ever.

We could even say that philosophy is a child of crisis. More often than not our reflections are born out of adversity, pain, loss, suffering, having to deal with problems – rather than comfort and complacency. Hegel said that philosophy can be defined as the crisis of each epoch, which is expressed in concepts. Most philosophers lived through turbulent times and their insights are a response to the crises of their own age. Socrates lived through war, the bubonic plague, the decline of Athens, political upheavals. Stoicism was founded by Zeno after he was shipwrecked near Athens. Many Stoics had difficult lives, whether Epictetus as a slave, Marcus Aurelius as Roman emperor at very challenging times or Seneca who, after a volatile life was forced to commit suicide by the Emperor Nero. The Stoics even prepared themselves for difficult times and welcomed them as an exercise in applied philosophy. One of their practices was called *premeditatio malorum* – 'premeditation of adversity'. Contemplating worst case scenarios helps us lose our fear and appreciate what we have.

Lastly, philosophy teaches us to think for ourselves. In times of so much false or misleading information and fake news; where information can travel within seconds all over the world; where information has the power to trigger the reaction of millions of people; in times like these it is paramount that we all think for ourselves and that we have a philosophical and ethical framework and points of reference for our choices and actions.

Philosophy has always made constructive contributions and been at the service of solutions. Philosophy is relevant at all times, but particularly in times of crisis. The role of philosophy is both to help us understand who we are, to make sense of what is happening and to enable us to discover universal principles. Philosophy is a valuable tool for diagnosing what is going wrong and why, and for predicting the outcome of lines of action. In times of crisis, philosophy is not a luxury but a necessity, and one of the most important means for arriving at shared values, lasting solutions and wise actions.

Sabine Leitner

The Philosophy of Climbing

"I am a wanderer and mountain-climber, said he to his heart, I love not the plains, and it seemeth I cannot long sit still.

And whatever may still overtake me as fate and experience – a wandering will be therein, and a mountain-climbing: in the end one experienceth only oneself."
– Friedrich Nietzsche

Nietzsche (1844–1900) was a German philosopher, poet and philologist whose work has exerted a profound influence on modern intellectual history.

Nietzsche, whose ideas included Eternal Return and Perspectivism, was also a proponent of *Amor Fati* – the love of fate or, in more 'perspectivist' terms, *the love of one's own fate*.

Amor Fati is not so much a submission to fate as an attitude in which one can accommodate and accept all life's experiences, whether prosperity or suffering, as good. Nietzsche's time in, and reverence for the Swiss Alps, the proximity of which was gifted through his professorship of Philology at Basel University, did much to develop this concept.

So what can we make of not merely just accepting, but coming to love, one's own fate? How do we discern between embracing fate and pursuing destiny, walking the path of high-risk versus that of pure recklessness? And why does mountain symbology marry itself so well to the notion of fate and higher ideals?

Throughout mythical, historical and popular culture, we see many examples of the ascetic, the sage, and the hero who overcomes fear and establishes a state of *Amor Fati*. The resulting 'super-man' (or *Übermensch*, to use Nietzsche's term) is then tested in the precarious ascent of a holy mountain or in undertaking contemplation in the caverns and hermitages of the cliff-edge – to return at some point with wisdom. But the wisdom of what?

For many, the modern equivalent of this archetype is expressed in the explorer and extreme sportsperson. But these contemporaries are rarely



Photo of Nietzsche by Gustav Adolf Schultze, 1882

revered as saviours, saintly or pious. In Robert McFarlane's book 'Mountains of Mind; a History of Fascination' he puts forward a commonly held stigmatisation – *"Those who travel to mountain-tops are half in love with themselves, and half in love with oblivion."* And in the mountain climber specifically, whose choices and actions are often viewed as foolhardy, even selfish, do we conclude that climbers are just nihilists? Is this enough to explain the addiction and fascination? Or is there another motivation, one that is not so forthcoming in appearance? In climbing, can we find something more profound – the philosophical answers to the nature of will, fate and existence?

"There are moments on high cold mountains, life-enhancing moments... they are fragile transient times when the borders between living and dying seem to overlap, when the past and future cease to exist and you are free."
 – Joe Simpson (British mountaineer)

So why does the climber climb? Is it for freedom? It could be argued that with all its dependency on conditions – weather, logistics, technical equipment, the personal limitations of body and mind – the mountain is a place of constraint, not freedom.

Perhaps Joe Simpson's musings give us some clues – that climbers experience freedom because of, and not in spite of, the constraints and dangers put upon them.

The Stoic Philosopher, Epictetus – himself a former slave – argued that being a slave did not deny him freedom in the most fundamental sense. Epictetus proposed that there are many things out of our control, and if we do not recognise this, we become a true slave, and freedom is lost.

Stoics, who are seen as the torchbearers of *Amor Fati*, perceive a wise person as someone who moves through life seemingly unimpeded by the things that cause distress to others, to a state of harmony with oneself and the world.

Mountains, and the act of ascending them, are one of the clearest examples where there is so much out of one's control. The wise climber, however, knows

their best 'piece of gear' is their *Will*, applied through reason, in accord with nature.

"Freedom in climbing is about knowing oneself and knowing one's environment well enough that one desires to do exactly what one can... freedom does not result from having many options; instead, it is a result of desiring precisely those things the mountain allows."
 – Kevin Krein, Climbing: Philosophy for Everyone



In climbing, there is a term used to describe the hardest, most risky move of the route – *the Crux*. Moving past the point of retreat (the crux), the climber transcends. They have come to know *Amor Fati* and have harmonised their nature with that of the mountain.

Then, the glory of 'summitting' is not in discovering God or one's "true self" at the top, but in what happened on the way up. When we are truly free, we stop clinging and start climbing.

Eddie Selby

Thus Spake Zarathustra: a book for all and none by Friedrich Nietzsche. (Translator: Thomas Common). 2008

Mountains of the Mind: a History of a Fascination by Robert Macfarlane, 2003

The Game of Ghosts by Joe Simpson, 1994

Who are the Master Puppeteers in the Pandemic World of High Finance?

The coronavirus pandemic has left a tragic legacy of untold deaths, poverty, social inequalities and fears for an uncertain future. What will the post-pandemic world look like? Nobody really knows, as huge simultaneous supply and demand-side shocks render past theories obsolete. Luckily, the “Master Puppeteers” suggested by Plato’s myth of the cave (*Republic*, Book VII) have a strategy for exiting this crisis. But what are their goals and who are they?

Unsurprisingly, their goals are to save the financial system - to provide the needed “credibility” for governments to cope with the huge costs of bankruptcies, massive unemployment and poverty. Boosting financial market confidence is critical to their strategy; underwritten by an invisible “safety net” limited to rich developed economies and a few strategic allies. But poor developing countries are left to fend for themselves.

The Wall Street Cave

Despite sharp initial declines, the “Master Puppeteers” have ensured that financial markets remain remarkably stable, as central banks promptly underwrote shaky financial systems (and too-big-to-fail firms). Indeed, the GAFAM¹ bell-weather shares of “optimism” have hit new peaks. This is critical

because confidence and optimism are essential in resolving all crises. In short, the rich and powerful have been saved first. Poverty, massive unemployment, rising inequalities and over-extended health and welfare systems will be dealt with in the future.

Indeed, this is the classic IMF policy sequencing formula for resolving developing countries’ crises. Even so, developed countries have also hesitated to launch expensive social programmes, owing to fears of higher inflation and interest rates. But today this logic has been inverted. Faced with the stark risks of depression and debt-deflation², Western governments

1. Share prices of the GAFAMs (Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon and Microsoft) soared in May 2020. The wealth of Messrs. Bezos and Zuckerberg (founders of Amazon and Facebook) increased by \$69 bn. and that of 175 American billionaires by 485\$bn. – see Market Watch, 29/5/2020

2. Debt-deflation occurs when weak demand creates falling prices. This leads to “real” interest rates exceeding the growth of nominal GDP – unsustainable debt-servicing burdens and default.



have embraced record budget deficits to avoid deflation. But again, this new regime excludes most poor/developing countries.

The invisible defence lines of market confidence

History and confidence are the critical differences between rich and poor countries, and are key in determining financial market confidence and debt-servicing capacity. High public debt/GDP ratios in “rich countries” raise few repayment concerns, because debt can be rolled-over to future generations³; and they also benefit from “an invisible line of defence”.

The latter is largely unknown to the public and based on the uncontested value of the US dollar and assured access to unlimited funding in periods of financial stress. This first line of defence assures the smooth functioning of the Western world’s financial system – based on a hard-wired pyramidal system of Central Bank “swap lines”⁴. This network basically underwrites the major banks and financial institutions in New York and the Western world⁵.

The US Federal Reserve⁶ is at the pinnacle, followed by the ECB, the Central banks of Japan, the U.K.,

Switzerland and Canada (and now includes Australia, Brazil, South Korea, Mexico, Singapore, Sweden, Denmark, Norway and New Zealand). In short, the “U.S. Federal Reserve” basically “guarantees” the solvency of its strategic foreign allies, when they need time and space, to shore up their damaged financial systems.⁷

The second step

Now that the first steps are in place, the second steps of kick-starting economic growth are now timidly underway.⁸ In fact, large early fiscal measures were urgently needed to avoid a deep recession.

Nonetheless, this economic recovery will be slow, given lingering public health concerns. Hence, resolving social and economic problems will take time and patience. But as political patience is rare, governments will be tempted to return to dead-end, quick-fix solutions (e.g. bailing out polluting automobile manufacturers, airlines, etc.).

However, this is not inevitable if our leaders have the courage and imagination to seize this rare opportunity to integrate steps towards a “greener, more equitable, socially responsible” society. This is possible, judging by Grameen bank’s successful sponsorship of thousands of micro-economic ventures, in more than 100 countries. Indeed, inspired by a call to action by the UN Secretary-General in 2004, a record number of Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) activities have been launched worldwide.

These are encouraging steps, but much remains to be done. Hence, our role as citizens of the world is to encourage and participate in these actions for a durable, more equitable society by “being the change that we want to see in the world”.

James Chan Lee, Retired Professor of Finance at Science-Po, Paris.



3. Japan’s debt/GDP ratio was 238% in 2018; but its bond yields on 5 - 10 year bonds were negative. Negative yields are currently common in many European countries

4. A swap line provides an exchange of national currencies between central banks, typically with the US Federal Reserve, to provide adequate liquidity in periods of financial stress

5. In 2013, these swap-lines were made permanent and their terms lengthened, with lower Fed interest charges in 2020. In June 2019, outstanding swap lines were \$11.9 trillion.

6. The 1913 Federal Reserve Act assures its independence, although the Fed is subject to Congressional oversight. The Chairman of the Fed is nominated by the President and approved by the Senate – and in many ways has more power than the President to act.

7. This first line of defence has held up quite well, despite early egotistical national reactions to the crisis. However, developing economies, such as Mexico and Brazil (producers of oil, raw materials, etc.) have seen investors flee to the US dollar and drawn on their swap lines.

8. Further fiscal stimulus in Europe is needed. However, such initiatives remain muted by differences concerning sharing debt-financing burdens. In the USA, further fiscal support measures also remain stalled by political differences.

The Magical Function of Rituals and Ceremonies

From an esoteric point of view, a ritual is dependent on the existence of the invisible dimension. This invisible dimension consists of a spiritual-mental aspect, which is the domain of the archetypes or 'living idea-beings' spoken of by the Platonists; and an 'astral' aspect, which is an intermediate world between spirit and matter, just as imagination is the link between the world of ideas and the physical world. In this view of things, the invisible world exists, the material world reflects. The visible is the shadow of the invisible.



A ritual or ceremony is a re-enactment of the creation of the world¹, an opportunity to connect with the creative forces of the origins and so to begin again, to regenerate oneself and to emerge renewed. An example of this is the rite of baptism, which is to be immersed in the primordial waters, to suffer the Deluge and to re-emerge on the primordial mound of a new creation.

Another way of looking at the ritual is to see it as a door to the invisible dimension, a means of access to the sacred. And this is why rituals are necessary, because the invisible is by its very nature difficult for us to access, prisoners as we are of flesh and matter.

¹ A Dictionary of Symbols, J.E. Cirlot

So we need special tools and devices to help us reach it. These tools are symbols, myths and rituals.

In the ritual, material elements play an important part. They are the vehicles through which the invisible can become manifest and the consciousness can ascend to a more exalted state than its usual mundane condition. These elements are, by way of example: sound, movement, aromas, postures, gestures, as well as ritual objects, statues and images.

The power of the spoken word is of great importance in any ritual, for example in the reciting aloud of a prayer. As H.P. Blavatsky explains in the first volume of *The Secret Doctrine*: "... the spoken word has a potency unknown to, unsuspected and disbelieved in, by the modern 'sages'... and such or another vibration in the air is sure to awaken corresponding powers..."

A prayer, in the philosophical sense, is not asking some god for a special favour, but is a means of offering the best part of oneself to something higher; it expresses an aspiration to become better, nobler, greater, to express the very highest part of ourselves. If the essence of that prayer is not somehow expressed in the actions of our everyday life, however, it has little or no value. The reciting of it in a ritual, alongside other aspiring human beings, reinforces our daily efforts, takes its power from our successes and our failures, and then feeds back into our daily existence. Perhaps this prayer will elicit a response from the invisible world, for, as the ancient Egyptians believed, the human being will receive the unconditional support of the Gods if he acts with justice and wisdom. The whole ceremony itself is a prayer in action – a way of connecting with the archetypal world and bringing it into action.

Music, as the harmonious expression of sound, has always played a central role in ceremonies everywhere. Mozart famously composed music for Freemasonic

ceremonies and Pythagoras is said to have used it in the ceremonies conducted at his school in Crotona.

Movement includes ritual postures and gestures, as well as the use of the directions of space: the four cardinal directions plus the nadir and zenith. For example, pointing up or down with the hand, turning to the left or the right, walking clockwise or anti-clockwise, etc.

For the current mentality, to give importance to such things is often considered 'mumbo-jumbo'. But in all symbolic traditions, the cardinal points have particular meanings. To take the simplest example, east symbolises sunrise (birth) while west represents sunset (death). Hence in the Egyptian city of Thebes (modern Luxor), the tombs were all constructed on the west bank of the Nile, where the sun sets over the Western Mountain. Newgrange in Ireland and Stonehenge in England face the east, so that the rising sun of the solstice can strike a particular point in the temple and bring enlightenment and renewal to participants in the rituals.

Is this all just fantasy and imagination? Fantasy, no; imagination, yes. For imagination is the capacity to symbolise and to connect with what the symbol (image) represents – its Being. The sun in this world represents another sun in the invisible world: God or the Great Spirit. The four directions are living symbols of the four great powers that, in some traditions, are said to govern the Cosmos.

Think of the knight who kneels in a gesture of humility, to be touched by the sword, symbol of justice, will and spiritual awakening, and then makes his oath to uphold justice and protect the weak against the strong. In this ceremony we have a posture, a gesture, a prayer (the spoken word) and a ritual object. In India we find a whole system of *asanas* (postures) and *mudras* (ritual gestures) which reflect the same importance given to these elements.

Other universal ritual objects are shells – symbols of birth and rebirth – used either as receptacles for the waters of life or, in the case of conches, as trumpet-like instruments to awaken the soul from its lethargy, dozing away in the folds of matter: a call to battle, to new life instead of stagnation.

In ancient Egypt, the land of magical rituals par excellence, we find the Was sceptre, a magical staff with the head of the god Set. Set is the instigator of chaos and confusion. By placing his head at the top of

this magical staff, it is transformed into a powerful instrument of renewal and strength.²

No ceremony would be complete without some special aromas, which evoke certain subtle and higher feelings. Frankincense, myrrh and sandalwood are some universal examples. Many people will be familiar with aromatherapy and may have experienced first-hand the power of aromas to induce certain psychological states. We can also think of their opposites – unpleasant smells – and how these bring the consciousness down to a lower physical level.



The French occultist Éliphas Lévi remarks in one of his books³ that the ceremony does not make the magician; the magician makes the ceremony. Without needing to be a magician, it is true that it is the participant in the ritual who must bring their own being into it; who must come not as a supplicant, but as an offeror, a 'sacrificer' (one who makes sacred), without looking for any reward.

As Confucius knew well, a ritual performed automatically is useless, because where there is no consciousness there is no elevation. Perhaps it is even worse than useless, because to do something sacred mechanically degrades and corrodes the Soul.

Julian Scott

² My Heart My Mother – Death and Rebirth in Ancient Egypt, by Alison Roberts

³ The Magical Ritual of the Sanctum Regnum

Aesthetic Intelligence

We have probably all heard about different types of intelligence: kinaesthetic, verbal, logical-mathematical and lately also emotional and even spiritual intelligence. Recently I came across the term *aesthetic intelligence* and it inspired me to think about what this could mean in a philosophical and metaphysical way and why it might be important.

From a philosophical perspective, we could define intelligence as discernment, which is the ability to judge well and to recognise the subtle differences

between similar things. Whether it is about arranging flowers in a vase, choosing between two wines, different interpretations of a piece of music, right and wrong or better and worse – we will always need discernment in order to judge the quality of something and to make a good decision. Discernment applies to all areas of our life – including the psychological, moral, aesthetic and spiritual. On a more metaphysical level, it enables us to separate the ephemeral from the transcendent



and the lasting from the transient. So, if intelligence is discernment, then aesthetic intelligence would be the ability to perceive beauty not only in its ephemeral manifestations but also in its transcendent essence.

Why should we develop our aesthetic intelligence? Because it will allow us to experience heightened states of consciousness; because it will help us to transcend the physical and material world and approach the realm of the archetypes; because it will enable us to love life more if we can perceive more of its beauty. In a world where so many people suffer from depression and lack of meaning, beauty can be a powerful medicine. People with less aesthetic intelligence live in a much more restricted world – it is almost as if they lived in a world of black and white, unable to see all the colours around them.

How can we increase our aesthetic intelligence? Firstly, we need to develop and deepen our perception of beauty. Every human being is endowed with the capacity to appreciate beauty, and any aspect of ourselves can be developed with time if we give our attention to it and practise. It is also important to widen the range of our experience of beauty. We all have aesthetic habits, which ultimately bind us to what we are already familiar with. If we always seek our experience of beauty in music, it might be useful to try to see it in poetry, or dance, or theatre, a different landscape or in our urban environment. We also need to allow beauty to really move us and penetrate us. The more we learn to integrate beauty into our lives, the more it will change us: it will alter the way we feel, think, act, relate and live our lives.

How can we learn to separate the transcendent beauty from its ephemeral manifestations? The best answer to this is given by Plato in his *Symposium*, where the priestess Diotima describes the ladder of beauty. It is possible, she says, to perceive beauty in itself, beyond any of its ephemeral manifestations. But to reach this goal, we have to learn to see it everywhere. First in the visible world of bodies and objects, then in the moral world of inner qualities, then in philosophical ideas and mathematical

abstractions. Thus, our experience of seeing beauty in more and more subtle forms will lead us closer and closer to absolute beauty. It is significant that Plato gives a hierarchy to experiences of beauty. However, this does not mean that we should not give value to all genuine experiences of beauty, no matter how different they are from our own.

The experience of beauty often happens spontaneously and cannot be repeated: a sudden cloud formation, a ray of light illuminating a drop of rain on a leaf, the unselfconscious smile on the face of another – these are moments where something deep within us is touched and fills us with delight. A few moments later and it is gone. We could almost compare it to a paranormal phenomenon: since it cannot be repeated in a laboratory with different types of people, it cannot be studied very well by science. Beauty leads us into areas beyond our systems of control. It cannot be defined, measured or possessed. In order to enter the mysterious land of beauty, we need to develop our own inner compass, in other words we need to develop our own aesthetic intelligence and not depend on what others say. We don't have to like things just because everyone else likes them. The gradual discernment and appreciation of beauty is a good road towards becoming more authentic.

There is much more that could be said about aesthetic intelligence. But as a last point I would like to emphasize that all forms of discernment enable us to choose better. The ability to discern beauty will enable us to choose what is more beautiful; since the Beautiful, the True, the Just and the Good are all aspects of the same Divine Reality according to the ancient Greeks, it will enable us at the same time to choose what is right, what is just, what is ethical. In New Acropolis we emphasize the link between aesthetics and ethics, which was already recognised thousands of years ago throughout the philosophies of East and West. Beauty can be a reliable guide and point of reference for our life. If we live in harmony with its laws, our life will also be good and just and true.

Sabine Leitner

Acupuncture

The 5000-year-old healing method that is still used today



In recent decades, there has been a revival of acupuncture and, together with other alternative and complementary medicines, it has become popular among medical students all over the world. For most people, acupuncture means stimulation of certain points on the body that can ease symptoms of sickness. But what makes this old healing method so attractive in the age of high-tech medical science?

No one knows how or when acupuncture began, but archaeologists have found traditional healing instruments, such as stone and bone needles, from the Shang Period (1766–1122 BC) in China. It is supposed that the technique is as old as medical science itself in China. The oldest written medical book, *The Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine* from about 100 BC, also mentions

acupuncture as a main therapy and provides a detailed description of 160 classical points along with meridians (channels) and a variety of needles.

Book printing in China was very helpful in spreading the knowledge throughout the country. There are records from the 11th century AD that *Wang Weiyi*, the famous physician from the Song dynasty, tested his students with man-sized bronze figures that were filled with water and covered with wax. If the medical aspirants put the needles in the right places during the exam, water spouted from the statue.

The main difference between the Eastern and the Western styles of medicine lies in how they regard the human being. In ancient China, mankind is seen as part of the cosmic and energetic world, not just an independent entity. In the West, physicians focused more on the body and the organs, while in the East, the focus was on the environment and the whole person, with their mental, emotional and energetic conditions.

The human being symbolizes the harmony between heaven and earth, or between the two poles, yin and yang. Yin represents calmness, cold, the passive side, while yang represents the active, the hot, dynamism. Yin and yang are changing all the time, as day follows night, and night follows day, as expressed in the tai-chi symbol. There are also five phases, which are associated with the five elements: wood, fire, metal, water

and earth. These phases or elements explain the connection between the internal organs and the cosmic cycles. The organs and the energetic conditions of the body can be matched with the elements.

When the human being is in harmony with himself and his environment (and the cosmos), he is healthy; if not, there is an imbalance, which appears in the form of an illness. The energy that

Together with acupuncture, herbs and exercises are prescribed for the patient as well, so the combination of these treatments can lead the patient to back to health.

There are critical voices in the West that claim that acupuncture, like all alternative treatments, is not proven, and not so effective as modern medical science. But it seems that the symptoms of many patients, especially those who suffer from chronic diseases, such



vitalizes people is the qi, the life force, which flows from the body's primary organs to other parts, like the skin, muscles, bones, etc. Acupuncture points that can be found mainly on the 12 meridians and on the 'extraordinary points' can be stimulated by different needles to redress the energetic balance in the body.

To understand the cause of the illness the doctor needs to be aware of his patient in every aspect, because even if there may be symptoms that are common to many people, each person is different and unique. To carry out a proper diagnosis is the key to curing the patient efficiently.

as rheumatism, allergies, vertigo or sleep disorders, can be eased by acupuncture. In the UK, acupuncture is used mainly in pain clinics and hospices, but in some GP clinics as well. Each year, 2.3 million acupuncture treatments are administered in the country. This amount of treatments indicates that acupuncture has a place in the modern medical system, as the old healing technique it uses is based on wisdom that never goes out of fashion.

Istvan Orban

Watch your ENERGY

Energy is something we don't really think about until we have to pay our electricity or gas bill, or when we go to the pump and fill up the tank. However, we don't realise - and I was guilty of it myself until recently - that a 40-litre tank of petrol (E95) contains as much energy as 500 grown men would give you in one 8-hour day of hard labour. So, let's put things in context.

Energy, by definition, is what changes the state of something, whether it be movement, temperature, form or electrical charge, to name just a few. For example, for liquid water to transform into steam it requires an input of energy in heat form. So, in order to change our environment, to move, build, exchange or communicate, we need energy. Our ancestors had to use their own energy (muscles) when they could not use the (re)usable ones of nature.

Ultimately all the energy we consume or use originates from the sun. Yes, even the evil fossil fuels we are so dependent on were once a by-product of the sun's energy.



Photo by Riccardo Annandale on Unsplash

As human beings, there are only two forms of energy we can use directly: the food we eat in order to act and think, and the sun itself for its heat and then indirectly its energy to grow all the plants, insects and animals we need to sustain our body and ecosystem. With the domestication of animals, we were able to use their energy for our benefit. And animals need little maintenance or reward compared to humans, which is also why slavery was so tempting for too many millennia by nations with more power and/or resources.

Up until the end of the 18th century, roughly 99% of the energy and 95% of the resources we used were renewable or reusable. Then, the progress of scientific research allowed us to harness the power of fossil and later fissile (nuclear) fuels which are not renewable,

unless you're ready to wait a few ten to a few hundred million years.

Which means that our energetic footprint is now ten times greater than in the pre-industrial era.

And if the widespread use of fossil fuels, starting with coal, dates back to the early 1800s, the world has been going through a craze for "new" and cheaper energies only recently and since the end of the Second World War. Our transport system has been revolutionised many times, through the inventions of the train, car and aeroplane. From the way we dress, eat, work or move about, everything has been changed dramatically by the use of the "holy trinity of fossil fuels" - coal, oil and natural gas. Those three primary energy sources have never replaced each other but rather have been combined to respond to the

constant demand for more and more energy.

It is only in the past 20-30 years, and with great efforts, that we have been managing to slow down and even halt the increase in usage of certain fossil fuels like coal, by adding to the list the wonderful and highly praised renewable energies (wind, solar, hydro and biomass). But apart from nuclear energy - which in my opinion is the only true alternative to one of the three fossil fuels when considering the demand and supply of the current system, although it has some very significant safety issues - it is foolish to think that the renewable energies will supplant or replace the 3-legged elephant in the room.

In the past decade, the Centre for Alternative Technology has come up with a plan for a Zero Carbon Britain. It involves not just replacing our current electricity generation and transport system with only renewable energies (mostly wind and biomass), but also reducing our global energy consumption by an impressive 60%.

Our modern society has become too dependent, if not - dare I say - addicted to what used to look like an abundant and limitless amount of energy. Therefore, we must go on an emergency diet if we don't want to end up in dangerous complications when the supply eventually diminishes, as is the inevitable fate of all non-renewable resources, which will then stop completely in a not so distant future.

Florimond Krins



Myths of Africa

Deepening our Understanding of Life and Death



Nok sculpture (Neolithic period).

Africa is a vast continent with many different peoples and a diverse diaspora whose cultural and spiritual heritage has often been misunderstood and misrepresented through colonial and Western perspectives. The ability to move past assumptions and conditioning always presents a challenge, which requires that we aim to see the essence of human life and experience. The philosopher seeks this essence and the profound depths often hidden behind the veil of myth.

Africa has been home to human beings and their ancestors for over 4,000,000 years and is often considered the birthplace of human life. In the myths of the Nilotic peoples and the Ewe tribe of Togo, there is the common idea that man is made out of clay. The use of clay to describe human beings is also found in some ancient Egyptian myths, as well as the Bible. What does it suggest? From a traditional point of view, clay describes the properties of

matter. Malleable and infinite in the shapes that it can take on, it is ever subject to change, can become rigid and fixed in forms which are fragile and eventually disintegrate, returning to the Earth... What moves and shapes the clay? In the creation myths of Africa, it is often a great creator God who also 'breathes life' into the 'clay', bringing it alive in the form of human beings. This 'breath of life', the mysterious consciousness, at once energy and spirit, impresses itself on the clay, transforming it into something entirely different.

Another common idea in African myths is the slightly tragic way in which human beings learn about their ultimate fate death. In the Nzami myth, Fan, the first man, was himself immortal but became arrogant and was duly punished. The new man who succeeded Fan was created differently with 'his head turned' in order that he could see death. Unlike the immortal Fan, this second man

had two parts: one immortal, one mortal; a soul and a body. In several other myths, God sends an animal messenger such as a leopard or a dog to tell man that he is immortal but something goes awry and the journey is interrupted; meanwhile, another messenger arrives first and distorts the message, telling man that he is to die. In these myths, man is again neither quite mortal nor immortal. There is a sense of ambiguity and the tragedy is that man has accepted death as his fate; and often, even when the true messenger gets to him and explains, man cannot accept the other message of immortality.

It is common for African traditions to have an animistic view of the world, where everything is alive and populated by spirits who can be communicated with in particular ways. A beautiful myth from Niger and Congo which goes some way to illuminating this viewpoint is of a 'divine root' from

which everything has its essence and into which everything will eventually return and dissolve. Nothing exists outside of this one source. Amongst the Bushmen there is also something similar to the 'Yggdrasil tree' of Norse mythology, a primordial tree from which all living things are born. These myths represent a profound concept of the human being, our position in the universe and our relationship to all other life. We find these ideas not wholly different from scientific theories of the origins of the universe. Where the scientist might refer to an atom, the African myth may refer to the seed.

These myths of Africa have nourished and guided the hearts of countless generations and still inspire some today. They are a precious jewel in the wealth of human experience and a rich source of inspiration for the lover of humanity, nature and wisdom.

Siobhan Farrar



