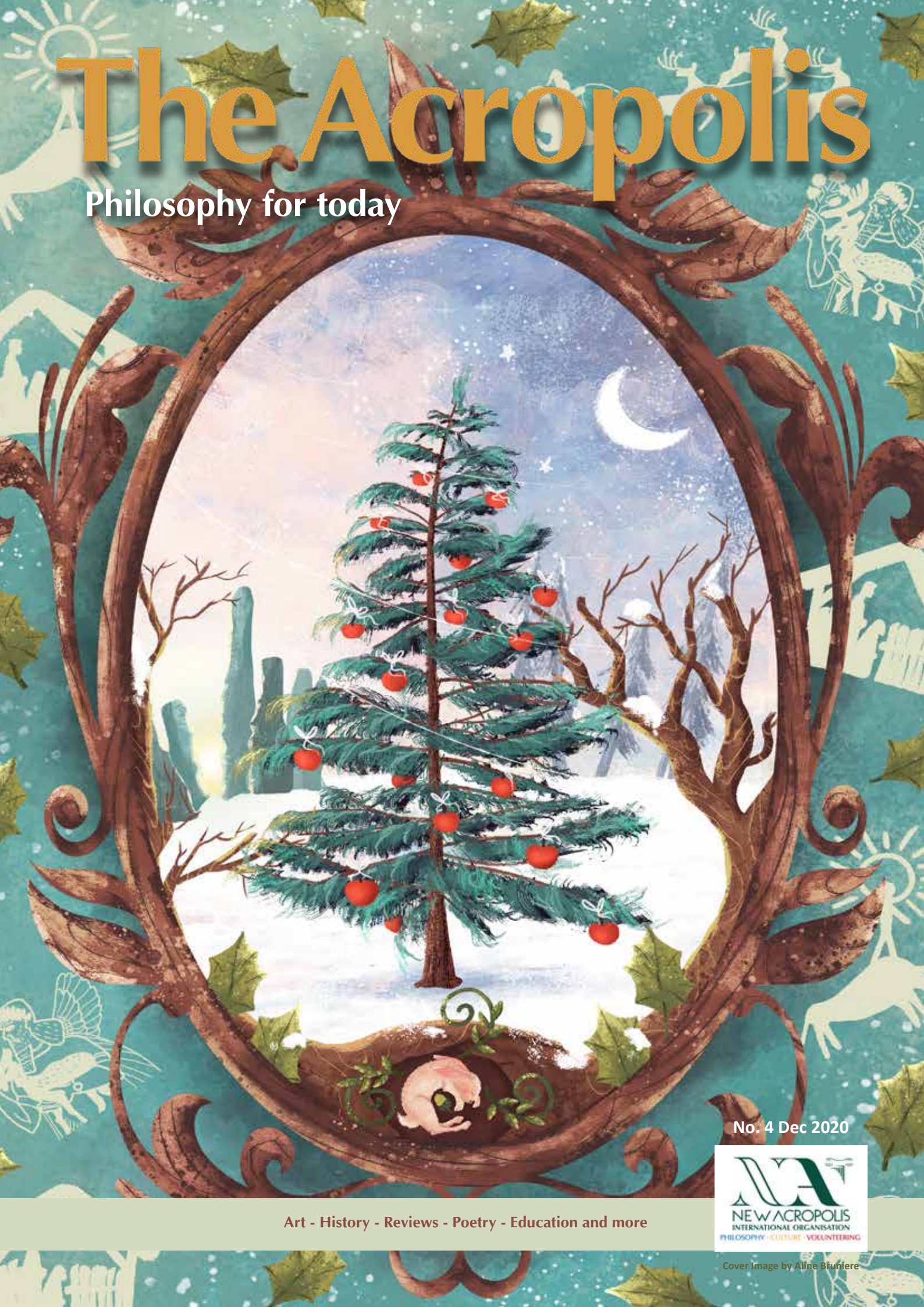


The Acropolis

Philosophy for today



No. 4 Dec 2020



Art - History - Reviews - Poetry - Education and more

Cover Image by Aline Bruniere



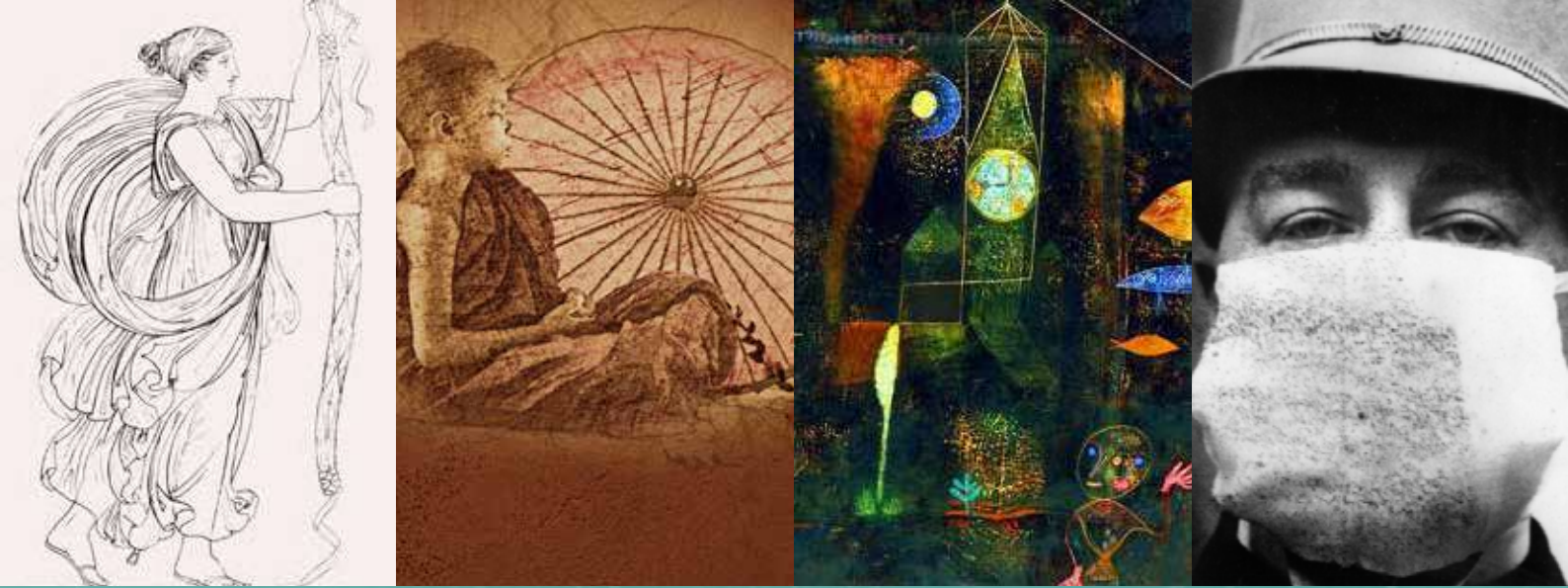
What is The Acropolis?

In ancient Athens the Acropolis, literally meaning the High City, was the place which supported the highest ideals of the people. The founder of New Acropolis International, Professor George Livraga, chose this name to capture the key objective of philosophy; that we as individuals build a new high city within, that we discover the heights of our own potential, so that we may externally build a new high city, a new and better world, together. The Acropolis magazine is motivated by this objective and aims to share inspiring content, combining all the major endeavours of philosophy, art, science, education and culture.

About Us

New Acropolis is an international organisation 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 further details please visit: www.acropolis.ie



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Philosophy: an aid to resilience

We cannot deny that our resilience is being tested. Indeed, for an individual or a group to be able to build and live in a satisfactory way despite difficult circumstances is the challenge of today.

We are living in paradoxical and contradictory situations that require the development of an inner resource. It is the daily practice of philosophy that can help us the most in this ordeal, in which we must also fight doubt and pessimism.

Ancient philosophies, which are now back in fashion, offered us an art of living, unlike most modern philosophers who transformed it into a technical language reserved only for specialists.

The philosophy proposed by Socrates, the Stoics and the Epicureans initially prepared people to experience something other than what can be seen in the here and now. Their challenge was to provide people with ways to live better, to develop responses to the concerns of everyone. While offering different paths, these schools of philosophy converged on the same discovery.

People are in a state of disquiet, unhappiness, in the grip of worry, anxiety and greed and above all, torn by passions. This emotional and intellectual state is powerful enough to dominate our mental life and subject us to one-sided and partial views.

But the human being can be delivered from this state where he does not really live, he can access an authentic life, improve and transform, learn to live, not subject to human prejudices and social conventions, but in accordance with its inner nature and its deepest dimension.

Through the practice of exercises such as those which modify the athlete's body, the practice of philosophy develops fortitude, modifies the internal climate of each of us, transforms the view of the world and ultimately the whole being.

As a school of philosophy in the classical tradition, we promote the practice of spiritual exercises according to the classical schools of philosophy and make them accessible to all through our classes and activities.

We sincerely believe that these simple practices that engage the body, soul and mind can help us to not confine our minds.

Alain Impellizzeri
Director, New Acropolis Ireland



**"Very little is needed to make a
happy life; it is all within yourself
in your way of thinking."**

Marcus Aurelius

www.acropolis.ie



ROMAN HOME for Christmas

The austerity of winter has always had a profound impact on populations living in temperate climates. This may explain the popularity of Sun-worship rituals and the diffusion of megalithic structures constructed to receive a shaft of sunlight in their central chamber at dawn of the winter solstice. In traditional societies the month leading to winter was a “feast month”: with harvest completed, provisions loaded and snow on the ground, time was available to celebrate and engage in social activities; sacrifices and offerings were held; fruits were tied to the branches of trees; candles and winter fires lit.

Harvest festivals typically took place later in warmer countries and in Ancient Rome, they were celebrated in December, honouring the god Saturn.

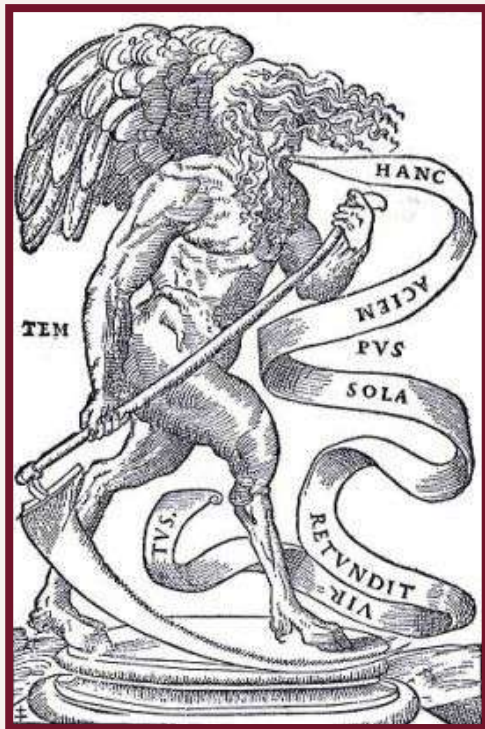
Saturn, after whom Saturday is named, and whose mythological reign was depicted as a “Golden Age” of plenty and peace, was at a later stage conflated with the Greek Cronus and associated with generativeness, wealth, periodic renewal and liberation. As Cicero mentioned, Saturn-Cronos represented “that power which maintains the cyclic course of times and seasons” [De Natura Deorum, Book II, Part ii, Section c]. This close link to seasons and an understanding of the cyclical passage of time, especially the temporal transition of the new year, reflects in the image of an elderly man holding a sickle or scythe associating him

with agriculture and the major festival marking the end of the sowing season. Saturnalia, originally taking place on December 17th (Saturn’s “birthday”), and gradually extended to end on December 23rd, became the most popular celebration in all the Empire’s provinces.

During this ancient and complex festival, complemented since 217 BCE with the Greek Kronia, halls were decked with evergreens; gifts were exchanged; Romans would parade wearing masks and animal skins, while the State would stop executions and refrain from declaring war. The figure of Saturn, kept during the year with its legs bound in wool, was released: an “unbinding” of Saturn-Time commemorating the conditions of the lost “Golden Age” before Saturn’s rule was overthrown. Depending on the Roman epoch, expressions of this sentiment varied in extremes, from the ritual and sacred to the profane and material. Not all of them were desirable conditions, driving a temporary release from civilised constraint. Boundaries were lifted and social inversion was widespread: year-end celebrations in which masters acted as slaves and vice-versa were popular in several regions of the Mediterranean, inspired by earlier Mesopotamia.

Late antiquity interpretations depicted Saturnalia as a festival of renewal of light, culminating in the winter solstice which, in the Northern Hemisphere, occurs around December 21st. With the Sun at its greatest

distance below the celestial equator, it marks the shortest period of daylight of the year, after which the reversal of the lengthening of nights and shortening of days begins: the journey of gradual elevation of the Sun in the sky.



Before the adoption of the Gregorian calendar, the shortest day of the year was December 24th. Eventually, in the first century AD, Saturnalia's last day was moved to December 25th, the first day in which daylight increased — the "rebirth" of the Sun, but not yet "Christmas" for early Christians. Not only was Easter by far their most significant festival, but Christmas was not a holy-day at all until the second bishop of Rome (ca. 130 AD) declared that the Nativity of Christ (the Christian Latin word for Christmas is *natālis/nātus*, "to have come to the light" or "to be born") should be celebrated during the Saturnalia period (a single day was not specified). The Roman historian Sextus Africanus (180-250 AD) dated Jesus' conception to March 25th (Spring equinox), the same date upon which he held that the world was created: nine months after would result in a December 25th birth. In 354 AD Pope Julius I chose this as the day commemorating the birth of Christ, probably because it was the last day of the Saturnalia celebration. However, in that period of Roman history, December 25th was also a civil holiday honouring the *Dies Natalis Solis Invicti*, the "Birthday of the Unconquered Sun".

Sol Invictus, the official Sun-God of the late Empire and patron of soldiers, held special prominence as god of day (light) and loyalty, and played a prominent role in the Mithraic mysteries, especially popular in the Roman army. The cult to Sol ("Sun") was continuous from the earliest history of the city and Invictus ("unconquered, invincible") was an epithet used for several deities,

including Jupiter, Mars, Hercules, and Apollo. Emperor Aurelian made Sol Invictus a state religion on 25th of December 274 AD, and in 325 AD Constantine, the first Christian emperor, declared the day to be an Immovable Feast for the whole Empire. Brought up in the Sol Invictus cult, he regarded himself as the supreme spiritual leader of both Sol Invictus and Christianity, seeking to unify both into a single state religion.

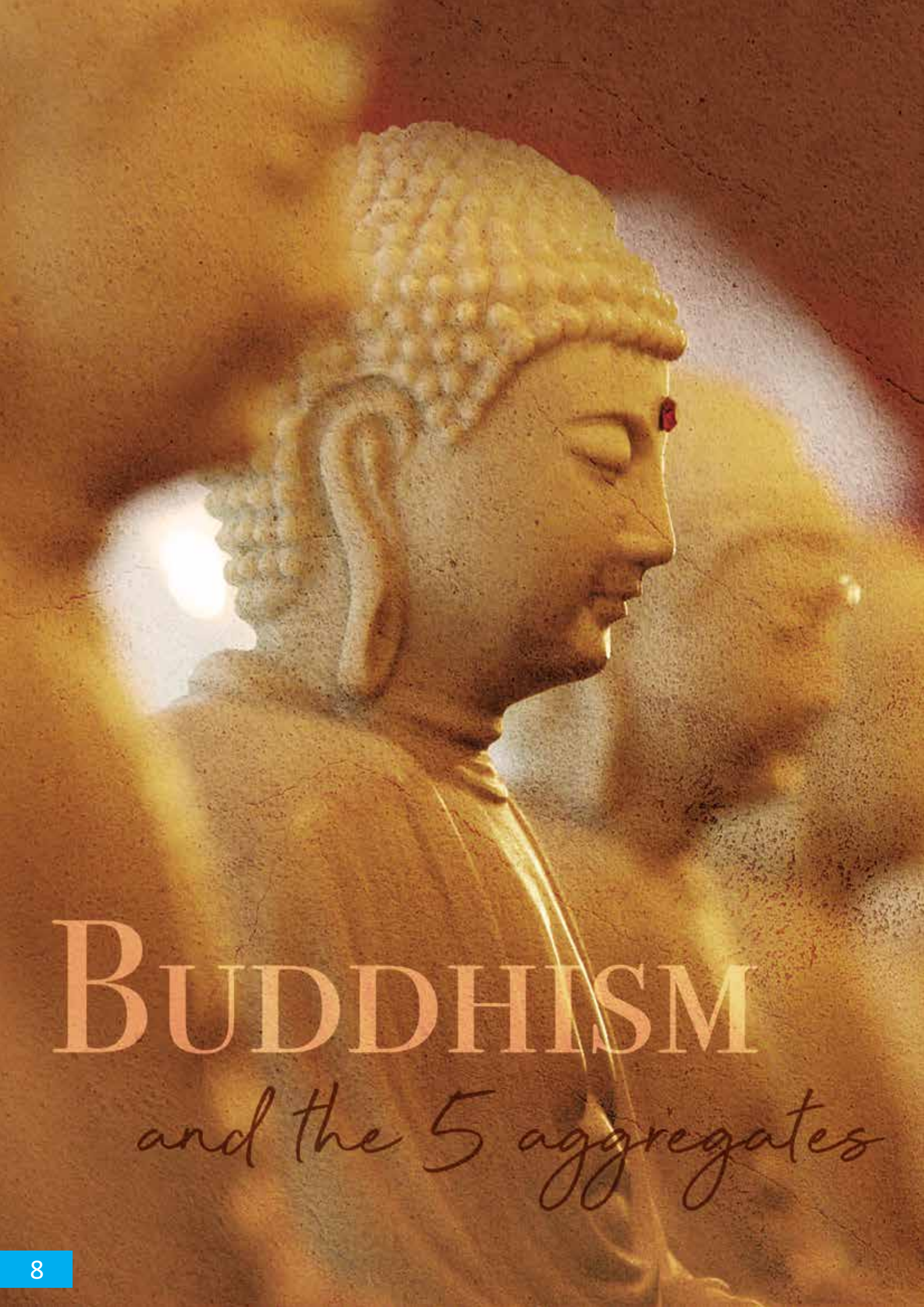
Despite efforts to control Saturnalia's most subversive tendencies and absorb them into the official cult, Sol Invicta ended up looking very much like the old Saturnalia and, with time, the celebration became absorbed more or less into the Christmas/winter festive period.

Some aspects of the Saturnalia may appear as incomprehensible to our modern eyes; their origins and rites are typical of a cyclical, cataclysmic, and not linear vision of time. Universe, and history, were conceived as repeating themselves, returning incessantly to mythical ages, so that the end of a cycle (solar, annual, lunar or seasonal) would generate a new beginning; dissolution coincided with re-generation; chaos and apparent casualty resolved into a new order.

Even if conditioned by the artificial light of a materialistic life, detached from Nature, our contemporary souls are, to different degrees, still tied to this "spiritual" past. We still perceive this "end-beginning" of something during the period leading to Christmas and year end. A time simultaneously obscure and reassuring, mysterious and familiar, in which not only the Sun, but also our inner existence stops and plunges into a cosmic night and "unbounded" state of origins. An interruption which forces a re-examination of life by many who are not inclined to such reflection.

Dark hours of the soul can transform the experience of life. The sun, symbol of man's spiritual light and energy, and winter solstice represent the possibility of regeneration for the macro and microcosms of existence, a new birth, the beginning of a new year.

Giulia Giacco



BUDDHISM

and the 5 aggregates

Buddhism suggests that by understanding all aspects of ourselves, referred to as the aggregates, we can then control and direct ourselves to practice 'karma yoga' - an action which causes the least possible negative consequences for ourselves and others.

These five aggregates, according to Buddhist teachings, define what a human being is, and like everything in the world, are in constant change. They are categorised as Form, Sensation, Perception, Mental Formation, and Consciousness.

Buddhist teaching describes the aggregates as the five elements that sum up the whole of an individual's mental and physical existence.

The first aggregate, Matter/Form, relates to material and physical form and includes the 6 sense organs: eyes, ears, nose, tongue, skin and the mind (perceiving ideas and thoughts).

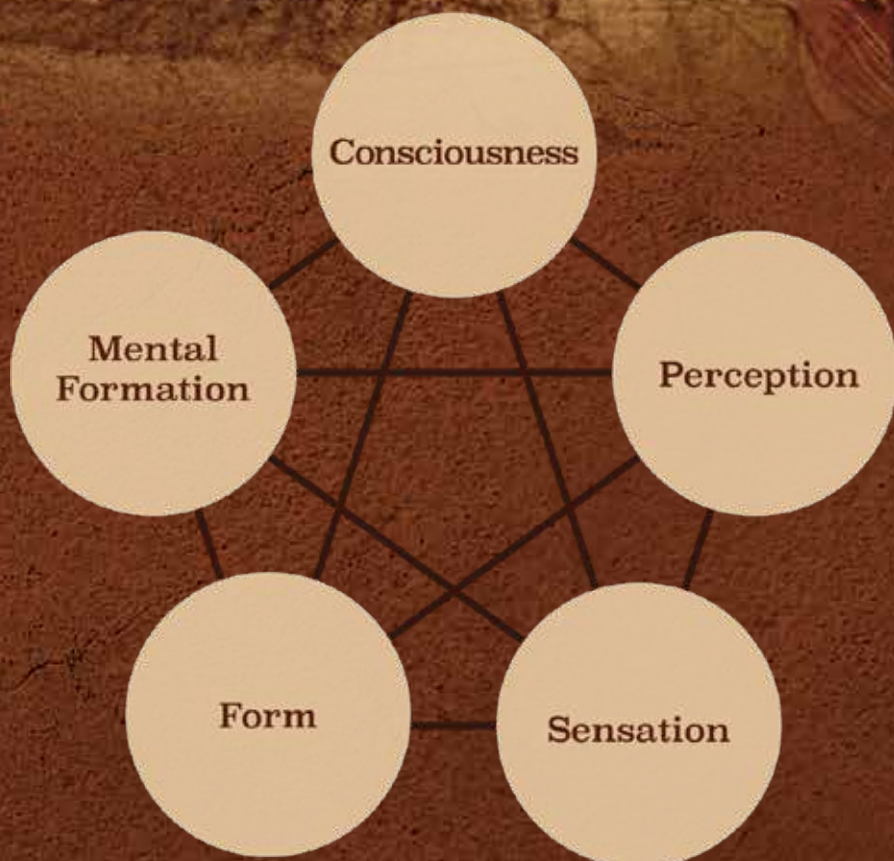
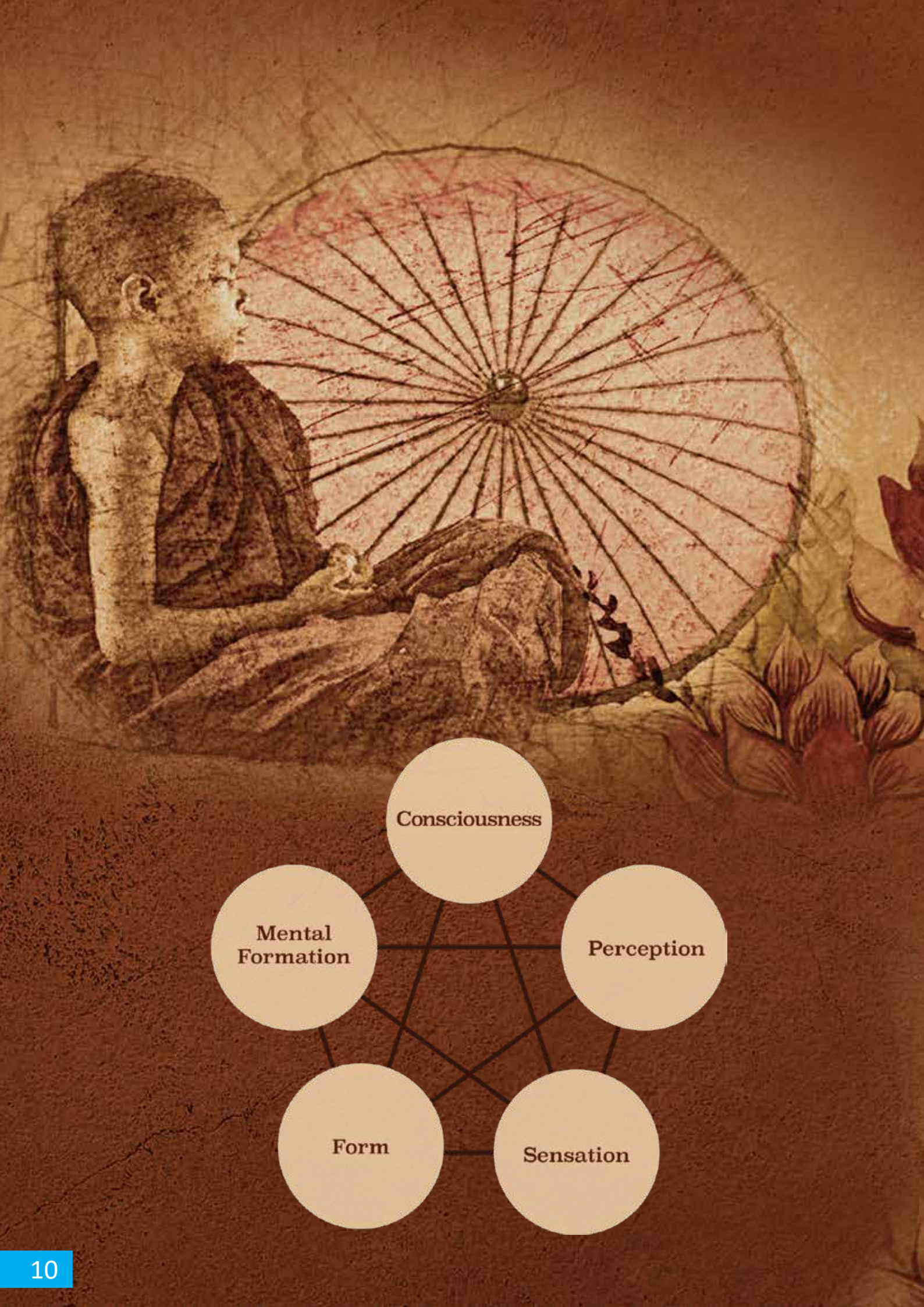
The second aggregate, Sensation, relates to the senses and are differentiated into pleasant versus unpleasant, or pleasure versus pain. This includes sight (beauty versus ugliness), sound (harmonious sound versus noise), smell (sweet versus foul), taste (appetizing versus unpalatable), touch (pleasant versus unpleasant) and mind (positive and negative thoughts).

The third aggregate, Perception, occurs when our six faculties come in contact with the world. The first three aggregates are very much linked and intertwined, and are sometimes described as passive - we constantly sense and perceive things throughout the day, in an involuntary manner.

Our perception/feelings are constantly changing, the way we react to situations changes. One day we may hear a sound that we usually love, but today we perceive it as annoying. The sound hasn't changed, our faculty to hear hasn't changed, but our perception has.

But it is also considered that we can train each of these faculties and can progressively master them. The most importance is given to the mind.

Before describing the fourth aggregate, we will look at the fifth aggregate, Consciousness/Awareness, underlies our sensations and perceptions and is associated with the sensory organs; the consciousness of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching and thinking. Buddhism suggests that consciousness is dependent on the other aggregates, it can't exist without them. For example, eye-consciousness exists because we have eyes, sight and therefore things that can be seen.



In Buddhist terms, 'we' or the concept of 'I', is neither any of the aggregates nor a combination of them, including consciousness. This means that we are not any of the aggregates and we are also not consciousness.

Returning now to the fourth aggregate is where it gets more interesting because here we make active changes to the way we interact, think, and perceive the world. The fourth aggregate, Mental Formation, or 'Volition', is where karma is generated. The Buddha describes it as follows:

"It is volition that I call Karma, having willed, one acts through body, speech and mind"
"Volitional actions produce karmic effects"

We label everything that we perceive and experience as good, bad, and indifferent, and we act based on the labelling that we apply, pleasure versus pain. We can also realise that these perceptions are expressed in duality: we cannot have one without the other, otherwise, there is nothing to compare to it; they are a pair.

For example, we appreciate health when we have been sick or unwell. We know and recognise justice because we observed or experienced injustice. However, we keep expecting only the beautiful, the pleasant, but without its opposite, we cannot recognise the ideal.

Mental formation is where dukkah (suffering) arises. The judgements or labels we apply, are based on what we know, the associations that we make. Usually, they are habitual, automatic: events and experiences trigger feelings of being pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. The challenge lies in being able to break our judgements and change our mental formation.

To change our mental formation it is suggested that we first acknowledge that our judgements are limited and they are also changing. There are many simple examples: some people love pineapples, others don't like them and yet others are neutral towards them; today we may enjoy walking along a beach that buzzes with people and activity, tomorrow it may be an annoyance to us. Or someone says something to us, we immediately apply a label/judgement - this is

something harsh, unfair, something I don't want to hear, we judge and discard it. But maybe they are right in their observation, only bringing something to our attention. To understand this better we can consider the parable of the seven blind men and the elephant.

Imagine seven blind men, perceiving an elephant: one man feels the trunk, one man feels the ear, one feels the belly, one feels the tail, one feels a leg and one the tusk. Each one describes their perception, one describes it as a snake, one a tree trunk, another one that it must be a wall. Each perception is reasonable, but it is not true because it does not have a complete view of reality.

We believe (and insist) that our perceptions of reality are the truth, but would it not be better to join them with others, and therefore get a little bit closer to reality?

Also, once we realise that all of our perceptions are limited, most arguments will stop. Our perception through the aggregates leads us to a sense of 'Self', or to the 'I'. Like 'I am sick', 'I am angry', 'I am tasting something sour' - we appropriate it or we integrate to our 'Self'. Or we identify with it: we create this illusion of a Self that is angry or busy, or cold, or has the flu, or is tasting, or smelling things.

In Buddhism, this is called 'conceit', meaning this is 'me' or this is 'I'. I am cold, I am old, I am calm. It is also called 'vision of ourselves' or the 'Ego'. When we identify with 'I' or 'me', we create separation: us and others.

When we create this sense of Self, we create clinging and desire, which is the source of suffering. And to change this vision of life, for Buddhism, the shift happens in the mind, practising the eightfold path and starting to become aware of the constant changes and accept changes and detach from them (detachment simply means to not apply any judgements or labels).

The less 'Self', the less clinging we have, the more content we become. And it is from that point that we can make wiser choices because we are not influenced and distracted by what our mind is producing.

Monika Edin



ALEXANDRIA

A Culture of Tolerance and Solidarity

When we think of the great cities of the classical world we often think of Athens or Rome but one that shone just as bright was Alexandria. This Egyptian city which hugs the coast of the Mediterranean was founded by Alexander the Great and was famous for its reputation of discovering knowledge in all its different aspects. At the heart of this project was the greatest known library and museum of antiquity. Due to its geographical location, it was a meeting point of trade, not only of physical goods but of metaphysical goods also, of different ideas, different values, different cultures which contributed to an openness in seeing points of view that were different from their own.

This openness and sharing of ideas led in part to an era of new discoveries; Eratosthenes being the first person to calculate the circumference of the Earth; the mechanical inventions of Archimedes such as the compound pulley and the irrigation screw which bore his name; Heron publishing a well-recognised description of a steam-powered device called an aeolipile, to name a few. In philosophy the school of Neoplatonism in Alexandria combined the teachings of Plato and other philosophical traditions in an eclectic way, integrating the best of all these different elements to create a unique whole.

Neoplatonism encouraged a dialogue between different traditions, where everyone could learn from each other, where no ideas were excluded simply because they were different. The possibility was always open that someone else's understanding of Man and the universe may be perfectly valid, contributing to the whole. What later emerged in Alexandria, which would result in its bright flame being extinguished, were fanatical groups opposed to this eclectic approach of the Neoplatonists. A fanatic sees only one point of view and is unable, or unwilling, to see other points of view, and thinks their view is right and the others are wrong. Fanaticism can be religious, political, scientific or artistic, it is not specific to a discipline, but rather a way of seeing the world.

What can we learn from this ancient city? Today in our world, when we open newspapers or look at the different news feeds, they reveal partisanship in politics, science and our society. Everywhere we turn, there is an unwillingness to understand the other person's or group's point of view, little desire to work together to get closer to the truth, or to find the best long term solution that satisfies the common good. One lesson we can learn from Alexandria is tolerance, to see that there are other points of view, different from our own.

Tolerance can be accepting others' right to be different, to have different views, but it does not necessarily mean we make the effort to understand them. We can be satisfied with putting up with each other, enduring or tolerating each other as long as we don't disturb each other. The hope to tolerate each other without making the effort to understand each other will inevitably lead to frictions, as we don't understand the other person's view.

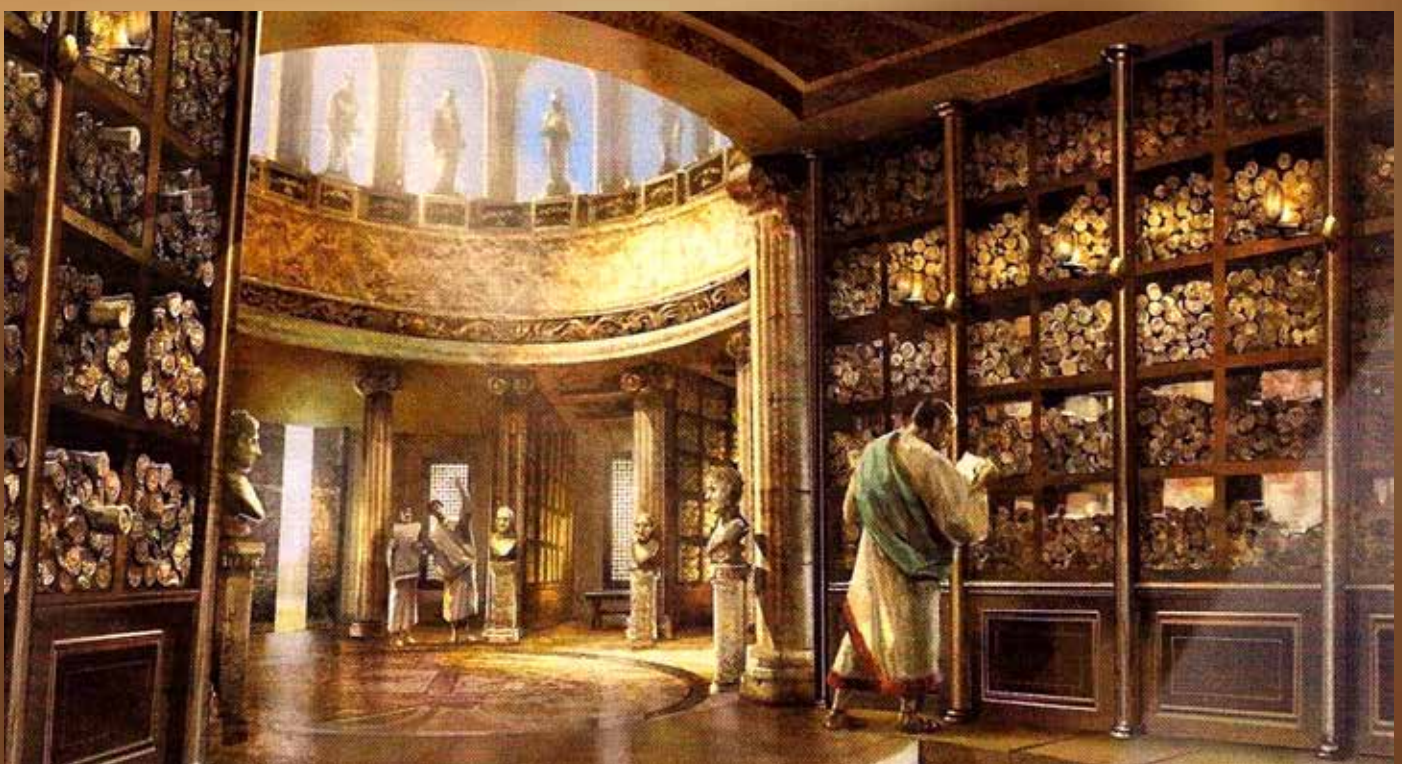
In Alexandria, there were different opinions, different religions, different ways of doing things but these differences were seen as a source of knowledge, opportunities to enrich oneself, and not perceived as a threat.

Tolerance is the first step but on its own, it will not bring about a positive change in our society. It is not only to look at our differences

and learn from them but also to recognise what we have in common, to be in solidarity. As human beings, we have more in common than what separates us. We have the same DNA, we share sentiments of love, generosity, goodness, and we all have dreams for a better world. These sentiments and ideals unite us in their universal nature. The Neoplatonists would advise connecting with that which is universal in ourselves so that we can recognise that universal aspect in others, to recognise our commonality and differences at the same time. This can be a challenge for the human being because the mind tends to think in black and white: either you are with me or against me. To be in solidarity is to accept the differences and at the same time to work together to find common solutions and not to allow the differences to dismantle the unity.

In Alexandria, we have the opportunity to learn from their history, from their experiences of what went well and not so well. It was not perfect, no city or time in history is but even through their mistakes there is an opportunity for learning. It is a model of tolerance and solidarity as other civilisations have been throughout humanity's history such as Ashoka in India and Moorish Spain, to name just two examples. In facing the current challenges in our world today the qualities of tolerance and solidarity are indispensable to rekindle unity among all people.

Michael Ward





12 DAYS OF YULE

If you ever wondered why there are '12 days of Christmas', the answer most likely lies in the pagan celebration of the solstice, known as Yule. The word Yule is the anglicised form of the Norse word Jul (or Jöl), the name for the midwinter festival oriented around the shortest day of the year, the northern hemisphere's winter solstice.

For the people of Germania, Scandinavia, and Anglo-Saxon England, understanding the cycles of nature and the sun, in particular, was critical to survival, and celebrating the winter solstice is an ancient pagan tradition, predating Christianity by several thousand years. The Stonehenge structure in England, dating back to 3000 BCE, is known to have a mysterious relationship with the solstices, as does the Newgrange monument in Ireland from the same period.



The word solstice, derived from the Latin sol, meaning 'sun', and sistere, meaning 'to stand still', refers to the point at which the sun 'stops' to change its direction having reached the furthest extent of its north-south traverse. During Yuletide (the time of Yule) the Nordic peoples celebrated the 'return of the sun' as the days began to grow longer again. As a period of rebirth, they also commemorated the dead and offered sacrifices for fertility, hoping for a good harvest in the year ahead. The Yuletide festivities are understood to have taken place over at least 3 days and involved slaughtering animals for the feast, gorging on food, especially meat, and drinking to excess, with singing and good cheer. During Yuletide, no work was done, and quarrels or fights were set aside so that the period could be kept holy.



Gradually Yuletide was extended to span a full 12 days and nights, blending several other traditions. The 12 days between the winter solstice and the beginning of the next solar year were considered a sacred period,

belonging neither to the old year nor the new year. These are the days of least sunlight and the Celts believed that the sun stood still for 12 days, so they lit fires to conquer the darkness and banish evil spirits. The Druids are believed to have created the tradition of the yule log, a bough of a large tree that was kept burning continuously for the 12 days between the solstice and the start of the solar year. Remnants of the previous year's log were used to start the fire: in effect, the 'light' was kept throughout the year and ensured continuity of good luck from year to year, from family to family, and from generation to generation.

but we are still part of the natural world and in 2020, a year dominated by the COVID-19 pandemic, we have been reminded that we are still powerless over the forces of nature. In this time of crisis, many are re-evaluating what is important in life and the type of society we want. In our reflections at the end of this year, we might draw from the ancient Yule tradition of accepting the cycles of nature and life, celebrating the promise of a new year, the value of togetherness, focusing on the noble virtues and the development of our moral character.

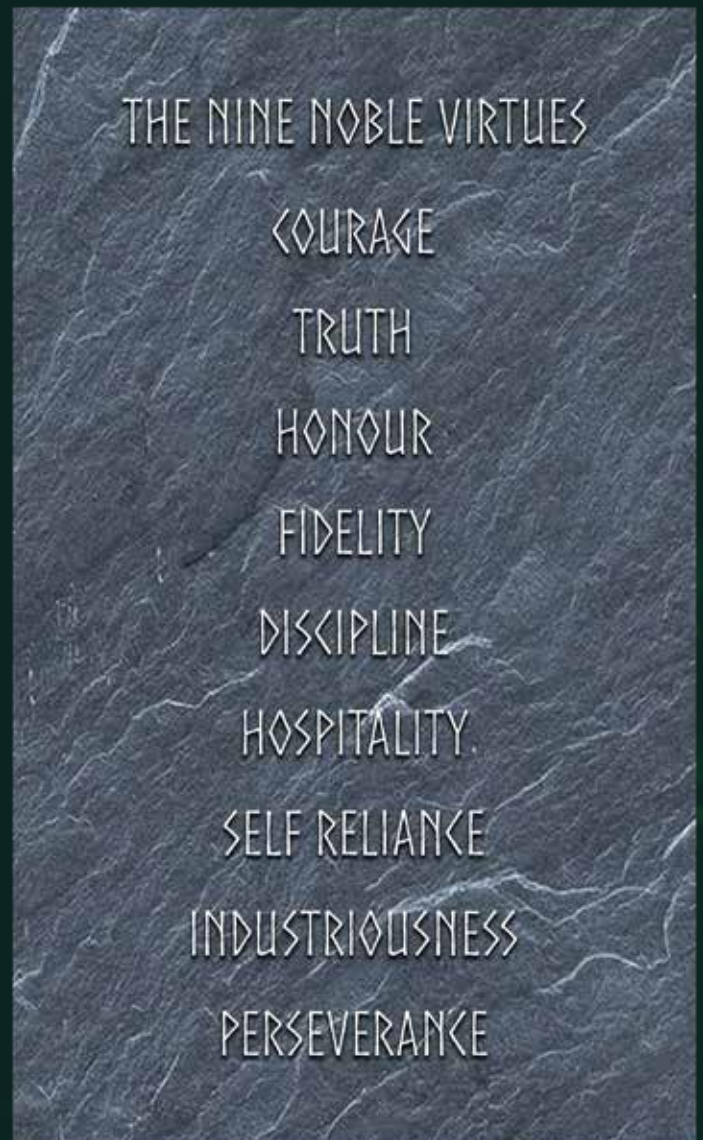
Martin McGranaghan



The first day of Yule, December 20th, is known as Mother's Night (Módraniht) and celebrations honour feminine ancestors and goddesses: the mother figures. The second day of Yule, December 21st, is known for The Wild Hunt. This is the night of the solstice, when Odin, as God of Death and Transition, rode through the sky, accompanied by furious winds, thunder, and lightning, collecting the souls of the dead. People stayed indoors, feasting, not venturing out for fear they might be swept up by the hunt. The Twelfth Night, December 31st, brings the festivities to a close and is associated with Wassailing, the wishing of good health in song, and the drinking of wassail, a warm alcoholic concoction (which in more recent times has become a Christmas tradition of carol-singing and the drinking of mulled wine punch).

During these 12 days of celebration, there was lots of close family contact with each day seen as representing one of the 12 months of the year. With the return of longer days and the ending of the solar year, they celebrated the start of another cycle of life, death, and rebirth. It was also a period of reflection with some traditions assigning individual days to focus on one of the Nine Noble Virtues from Norse religion, considered to form a spiritual law and moral code by which one should live life.

Today's Christmas traditions may have borrowed much from ancient Nordic traditions of Yule but did so without retaining their meaning. In our increasingly materialistic and commercially-driven Christmas season, we might ask ourselves what is it that we celebrate at this time of year, and what is the meaning behind our so-called customs. Certainly, we no longer depend upon the solar cycles for survival like our ancient northern ancestors,



Fortitude

in the Face of Difficulties

A Philosophical insight into
the nature of inner strength

When 2020 began, we did not yet know the extent of the difficult times we would have to face. A short time later came the spread of a pandemic, which affected most – if not all – countries in the world, showing that in such cases what we regard as differences do not exist. We are all human beings, we are all vulnerable to sickness and we are all affected by pain.

Every day we see with surprise and panic the number of people affected by the coronavirus, the growing number of deaths, and even if fortunately many recover, the number of those who have lost their lives is breath-taking. It is so great that sometimes we see no more than figures and we forget the pain of those who leave this world in the loneliness of a hospital or in worse places, or in the sadness of those who cannot approach or say goodbye to their loved ones.

We do not see, however much it is repeated, the tireless dedication of those who are sparing no efforts to save lives, to raise the spirits of those who feel unprotected. They are true models of Fortitude.

Evidently, these are difficult times, and above all, special times which put our inner values to the test.

To know how to suffer is not easy, but if there is fortitude, suffering becomes an enormous power which we were not aware of and we did not know we could develop. There are forms of suffering which ennoble, and we have only to think of the great number of wonderful works of art that have been born under the influence of pain. However, they are expressions of pain that transport us to elevated spheres of consciousness, producing, more than consolation, a sense of infinity which allows us to merge with the whole universe.

We should have contact every day with the beauty that restores our dignity and makes us feel greater and better.

Behind pain there is a meaning, and although when we are trapped by pain we do not understand the meaning of life, we should make an effort to reach those causes that are deeper than those which are simply evident. This deeper understanding would help us to discover other causes, other answers which are not so evident, but no less true for that.

I know it is easy to use words to explain, words to console, words... However, in the absence of another more intimate and subtle means of communication, we have no other option than to use words. If we were to remember some ancient teachings, those which time has swallowed up in favour of more superficial and insignificant forms, we would recover the hidden meaning that lies concealed behind words. Each of them contains a concept, an idea. And the sound of that word should be enough for its inner meaning to return to us.

**True fortitude needs union.
Alone we can do many things,
but united in heart with those
with whom we share our lives,
we can almost make miracles.**

We recommend "fortitude" and we don't know exactly what we mean by it. Is it to put up with pain without anyone noticing? Is it to hide our tears? Is it to show coldness when we are burning inside? Is it to fall into apathy and lack of feelings? Is it to resort to aggression to give vent to what we cannot show?

Unfortunately, those forms of apparent fortitude have a short duration and sooner or later are lost, giving rise to much coarser or more inappropriate expressions of the human being. Then, we mistrust fortitude and any other moral value which may be similar to it.

While we are waiting for words to acquire a special meaning, we believe that fortitude is a kind of strength, naturally, but needs other elements to complete it and turn it into a living value.



Drawing by Tim Leahy

True fortitude needs will, which means a permanent value founded on our principles and in what we want to do in life. It is a type of courage that is not destroyed in the face of adversities, but, on the contrary, grows and becomes more powerful and refined. It is the capacity for decision and for taking responsibility for one's mistakes in order to return to life again and again with a renewed desire to improve oneself.

True fortitude needs intelligence, not reasoning. Intelligence searches for the reasons behind things, it is capable of seeing behind the appearances and of grasping immediately, in a flash, what is hidden behind each situation, behind each person, behind oneself.

True fortitude needs love. Far from this virtue is hardness of character, coldness and ill-treatment. On the contrary, the strongest person is the one who understands most and loves most, who understands others and loves himself by giving himself opportunities, far from pride and vanity.

True fortitude needs union. Alone we can do many things, but united in heart with those with whom we share our lives, we can almost make miracles. Union gives strength which multiplies our own by millions, it multiplies will, intelligence and love.

Fortitude and Union are unique medicines in difficult and special times.

Delia Steinburg Guzmán

The Alchemy of

Paul Klee

Paul Klee was a Swiss-born German artist, who lived from 1879 - 1940. He is regarded today as one of the giants of early 20th Century modern art, alongside contemporaries such as Picasso, Matisse, Chagal, and Kandinsky. Not only was he a painter, but he was also an accomplished violinist and deeply passionate about using creative expression as a means of pedagogical exploration.

Throughout his career Klee kept extensive notes on his creative process; and within them, he theorised on all aspects of pictorial production that now have similar importance for modern art as had Leonardo's writings which composed his theory of painting for Renaissance art.

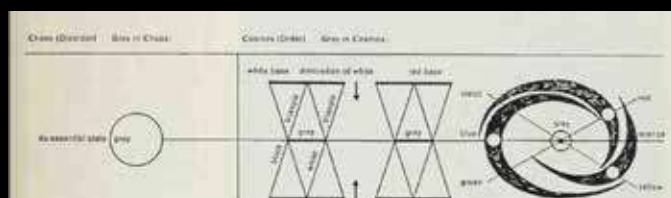
From January 1921 to April 1931, Paul Klee taught at the Bauhaus school of art, design, and architecture in Weimar, Germany. The college was a radically forward-thinking school which sought to combine elements of fine art, design, and architecture in order to answer and shape the needs of the modern era. It was during this time while lecturing that Klee was in one of his most prolific periods and created the large majority of his 1400 works. His immense body of work is a mixture of mediums such as watercolours, collage, pencil or ink drawings, oil and acrylic painting and even puppet and set design. It is testament to his ceaseless creativity but can now be seen, in accompaniment with his

notebooks, as not only stand-alone works but exercises in deep creative investigation, in which everything from the inner psyche to the outer cosmos is tapped into and manifested through the artist.

It is in fact on the first page of his published notebook "The Thinking Eye" that Klee brings us to the starting point of creation, both figuratively and metaphorically. The point in which order begins from chaos:

"When central importance is given to a point: this is the cosmogenetic moment. To this occurrence corresponds the idea of every sort of beginning (e.g. procreation) or better still, the concept of the egg."

From here Klee writes and theorises extensively throughout "The Thinking Eye" on everything from physics, music, architecture, and especially colour, which he contemplates in terms of the cosmos. He uses the analogy of "the grey area" as being between black and white - chaos and order, birth and death - and one can start to recognise the parallels of Buddhist thought, which speaks of the ambiguity of existence and the search for balance and harmony within the apparent chaos of the universe.



-Image from *The Thinking Eye* notebook. Klee contemplates colour theory in relation to the cosmos.

And it is with this almost alchemical approach to creative expression that Klee brings in the forces of nature and the cosmos into his art. Throughout his work there is continuous movement and countermovement of opposing forces, be it the extremes of dark and light colour, heavy to light tones, or balancing varying shapes in pictorial space. At the heart of this, Klee is searching for the same unity found within nature.

"A living balanced nature; the rhythm of day and night. Their order and interpenetration are of a natural kind."

And throughout his notes, this quest for manifesting his will through the ways of the cosmos is evident:

"In the universe, movement is the essential given, the bases of all becoming."

"...I begin logically with chaos, that is the most natural,...because at the start I may myself be chaos. Chaos is an unordered state of things, a confusion. 'Cosmogenetically' speaking, it is a mythical primordial state of the world, from which the ordered cosmos develops, step by step"

"In the universe, movement is the essential given, the bases of all becoming."

Throughout all the complexity and insatiable quest for creative discovery, what is most remarkable about Klee's work is his ability to reduce such lofty theorising into work which appears almost childlike in expression.

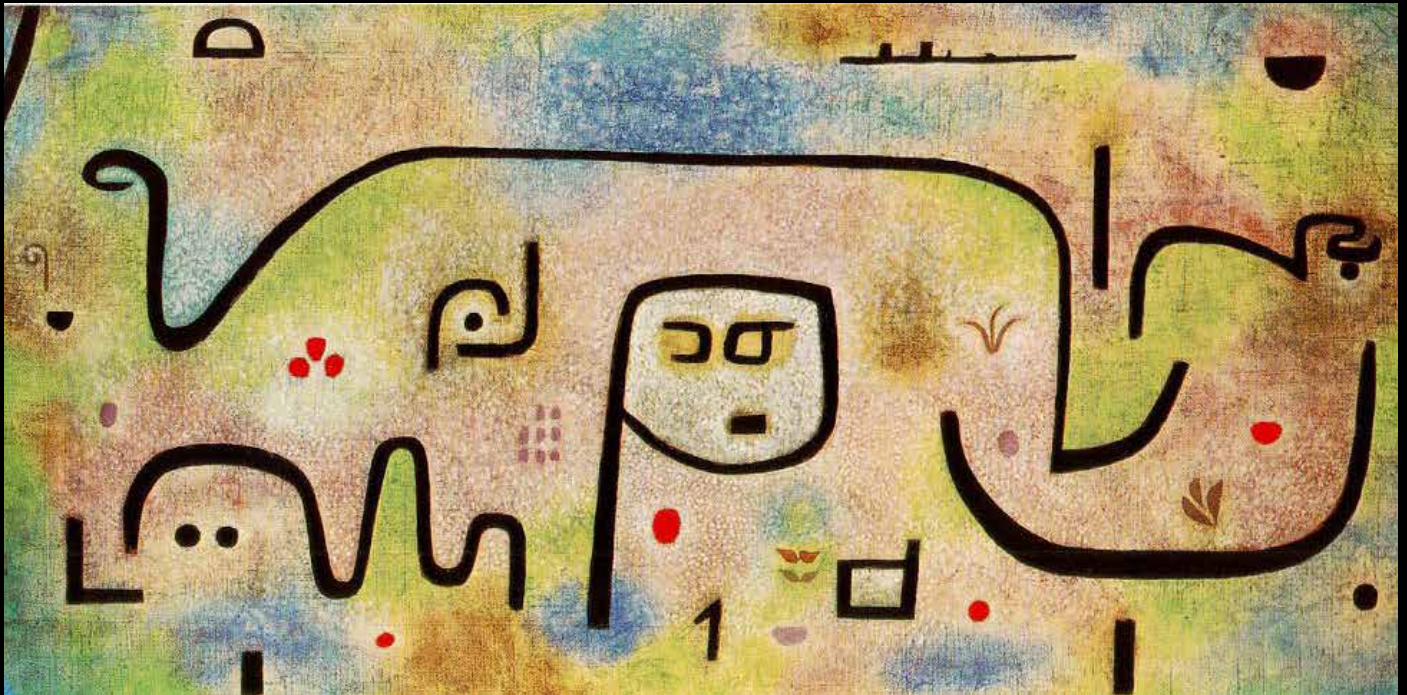
While we may be mystified in interpreting some of his paintings, it can not be easily said that they leave us cold. The work bursts with enthusiasm for the simple joys of expression but there is also a sentiment felt of the artist's will to ceaselessly manifest what is within with honesty and spirit. And this is perhaps Klee's most important lesson for us, that of the expression of true authenticity.

"Intention is not to reflect the surface - as would a photographic plate - but to inwardness."

Paul Savage



Fish Magic, 1925



Insula Dulcamara, 1938 -At first glance, this painting seems to be rendering ancient text perhaps even an extra terrestrial language. Klee is never shy in giving us signs to interpret like hieroglyphics. Some comments on this work draw on the central figure as the hero, perhaps Paul himself given the shape of a "P". He is in the centre and to the left of him a demonic snake tempts his will. We see a thick black line envelop the characters, forming an overarching landscape, which the figures exist in. Out on the coastline the horizon is marked by the slow passing of a steam boat. Time rolls on, night and day are balanced by the hollow and black semi circles to each side.

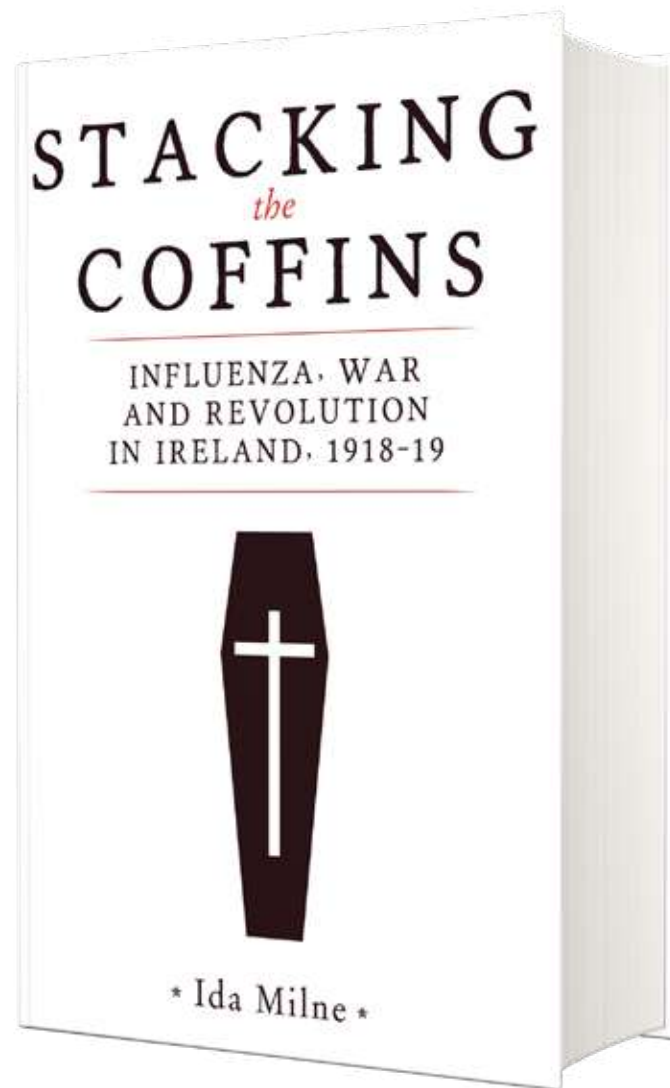


Around the Fish, 1926 - More symbols and some that we immediately recognise. But for Klee his intention was to bring symbols beyond cultural connotations. "The object grows beyond its appearance through our knowledge of its inner being, through the knowledge that the thing is more than its outward aspect suggests."



Ad Parnassum, 1932 - references the concept of learning and knowledge in the title. Mount Parnassus in Greece was a sacred mountain which was worshiped as the home of literature, poetry, and in many regards learning.

The work itself highlights Klee's masterful use of colour. Using a microscopic approach similar to George Seurat's pointillism method, small squares of individual colour are meticulously applied to the canvas that when seen as a whole, form an incredible swarming hive of interconnected tonal ranges. This again demonstrates the emphasis of the micro and macro in his work and the unity he feels towards the inner self and the cosmos as a whole.



"...studying the impact of disease on society is a useful exercise for the historian as disease can often evoke and reflect collective responses, permitting an understanding of the values and attitudes of society in which they occur. "

Excerpt from *Stacking the Coffins* by Ida Milne

Ida Milne's impressive historical account is 2 years old at the time of this review. 2018 marked the 100th anniversary of the Spanish Flu, a global pandemic that shook an already weary, war-ravaged world from 1918 to 1920. At the time, the book served to unveil an aspect of Irish history which was largely unknown. The period itself was tumultuous and well documented; in the wake of the Great War, with rebellion simmering and revolution on the horizon. But the reality of the plague that claimed over 20,000 lives (according to conservative estimates) and infected over 800,000 more had somehow sunken into a national historical blind spot. Milne worked to assemble a comprehensive collage of newspaper, medical and oral reports of the event and the context of the time and circumstances in which this virulent influenza struck. The result is a sterling, if not always gripping, account and a fascinating insight into hindsight being 20/20. As we battle the realities of Covid-19, 2 years after the book was released and over a century after the titular flu, what similarities can be observed? What, if anything, can we learn?



Despite the somewhat grim title, *Stacking the Coffins* is not a morbid read. It's a thorough historical document assembling a jigsaw puzzle of facts, educated speculation and personal accounts. Though interesting, the straight historical information can be a little too dry to ever be accused of being compelling. Where the words really jump off the page is with the tragically human, personal tales of loss from survivors in their 90s and even 100s. The stories beyond the data are always what bring these events home to us, something we are experiencing again as we have become numb to the endless figures that relay the status of COVID-19 infections but dehumanise the victims. Every digit is a person, every number attached to a family and friends who lost a loved one. The stories are also touching and even inspiring, telling of the bravery of the local doctors, overworked, and of the compassion of volunteers as communities banded together to support one another in the midst of the crisis. Something that has also, thankfully, become familiar to us now.

The crux of Milne's portrayal of the time is the socio-political context of the Spanish Flu in Ireland. After the apparent failure of the 1916 rising, British rule appeared unquestionable. However, the inability of the local authorities to manage the pandemic widened the fissures of societal discontent, never having been fully closed and, indeed, having been reopened by the impact of World War I.

Like victims with underlying health conditions, fragile political systems fall prey to a pandemic, yet another parallel we can draw with the modern coronavirus crisis. What is clear from the book is that people were held in the grip of that pandemic, powerless to do anything other than isolate and practice extreme hygiene. The medical system was overwhelmed and without a vaccine, there was an air of helplessness and fear that was as impactful as the virus itself. While reading *Stacking the Coffins* one can easily mistake portions of it for an accurate account of today but despite the fatalities and the oft crushing hopelessness, Ireland (and all nations of the world) got through it. There was a sense of cataclysm, irreparable upheaval, resulting from such a plague following on the bloody coattails of the greatest global conflict in history. It's not hard to imagine how it may have felt like the end of the world. There was crisis and change but through compassion and fortitude, people endured. It's an important lesson in history, that our circumstances, while unique to our lifetime, are far from unique or unprecedented. It is our self-centredness that makes



us feel the victim of unjust circumstance, with no view of how events have played out in the past. History is a humbling reminder of what has come before and what can be overcome again.

History also contains a cautionary tale, for those who do not learn from it are doomed to repeat it. Milne writes about the advances that came about as a result of the Spanish Flu, not only in medicine but in the global collaboration of the scientific community in learning from the pandemic to prevent future similar events. That optimism now presents a bitter irony, that despite the learnings, the experience, the trauma of one hundred years ago, we seemed ill-prepared for Covid-19. If anything, our modern system, so highly prized, transpired to be all the more vulnerable to the wrath of that microscopic entity. If we are to learn anything from the past, we need to accept the reality we are experiencing now and not fall into the naïve assumption that nothing like this will ever happen again. Yes, we will overcome, as the previous generation of the Spanish Flu did, but if our only desire is to return to the "way things were", the lessons of history will pass us by and Nature will have no choice but to insist in showing us the error of our ways.

Aidan Murphy

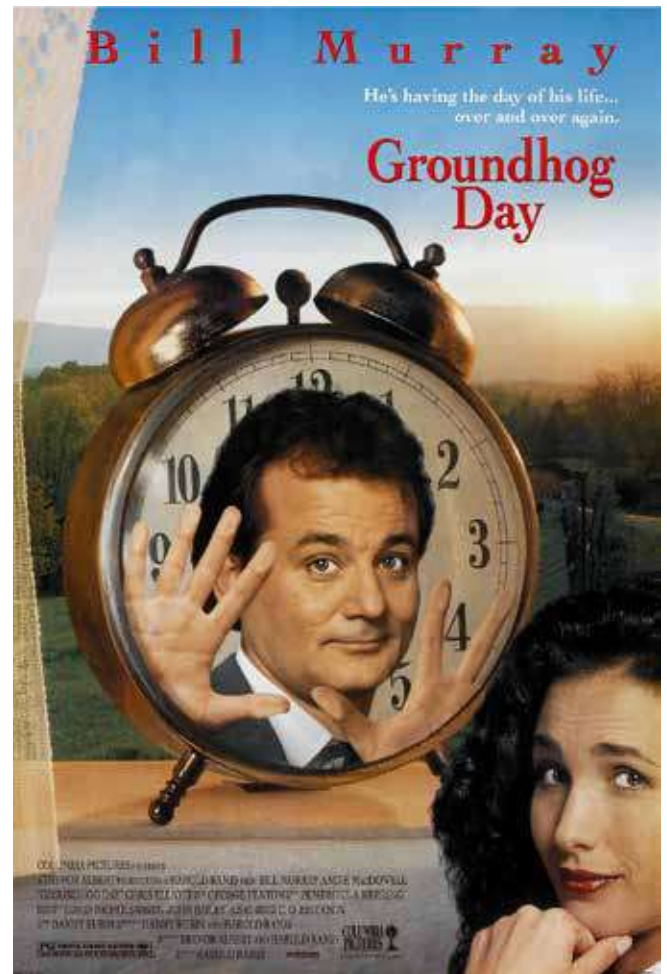
The term Groundhog Day, as we understand it today, did not exist before 1993, and the fact that this term is now so widely used and understood is a testament to the universal appeal of the film, co-written and directed by the late Harold Ramis.

The film is a fantasy comedy starring Bill Murray as TV weatherman Phil Connors, and Andie MacDowell as the tolerant and patient producer, Rita Hanson. They travel to the small town of Punxsutawney near Pittsburgh, to cover the 'Groundhog Day' festivities. Phil hates the town, and the Groundhog Day event, and he is desperate to return to Pittsburgh but a storm forces them to return to Punxsutawney for another night. When Phil wakes the next morning the same song plays on the radio, and gradually he realises that he is reliving the previous day all over again. Bewildered, he muddles through a repeat of his report and again attempts to leave Punxsutawney only to end up spending a third night there. The next morning, Phil again wakes to Sonny and Cher playing on the radio and he quickly realises that it's Groundhog Day all over again. And so begins an endless cycle for Phil: he is doomed to continuously relive his least favourite of all days - Groundhog Day in Punxsutawney.

At first, we have little sympathy for Phil, and we even revel in his misfortune, because Phil is an unpleasant individual: he's discontented, cynical, self-centred, rude, and insensitive. In short, he's a jerk. Much of the comedy that ensues derives from Phil's futile attempts to come to terms with his fate. His instinctive nature has him exploit the situation. He tries repeatedly to win Rita's affection, and even though he comes close, she always sees through his ruse. None of his contrived pursuits brings him either momentary or lasting joy. We begin to realise that Phil is deeply unhappy, and indeed he falls into a depression and commits suicide more than once, only to wake again, every time, back in Groundhog Day. The mood changes and we begin to feel sorry for Phil, perhaps we even identify with him.

Then something happens. He hears classical music in a diner and decides to learn the piano. This time he is not scheming to impress Rita, instead he plays for the simple beauty of it, and his pleasure. Phil begins to change. He takes an interest in people, helps them and takes care of them, and he develops various skills for himself. His mood changes and he seems content and happy, even though there is some sadness. As we approach the end of the film, Phil is satisfied with his daily 'errands', no longer concerned with trying to win Rita's affection, he finds joy in everything he does, helping others and looking for nothing in return.

Rita is intrigued by this new, transformed Phil. As she learns more about him, his hidden talents, how he has



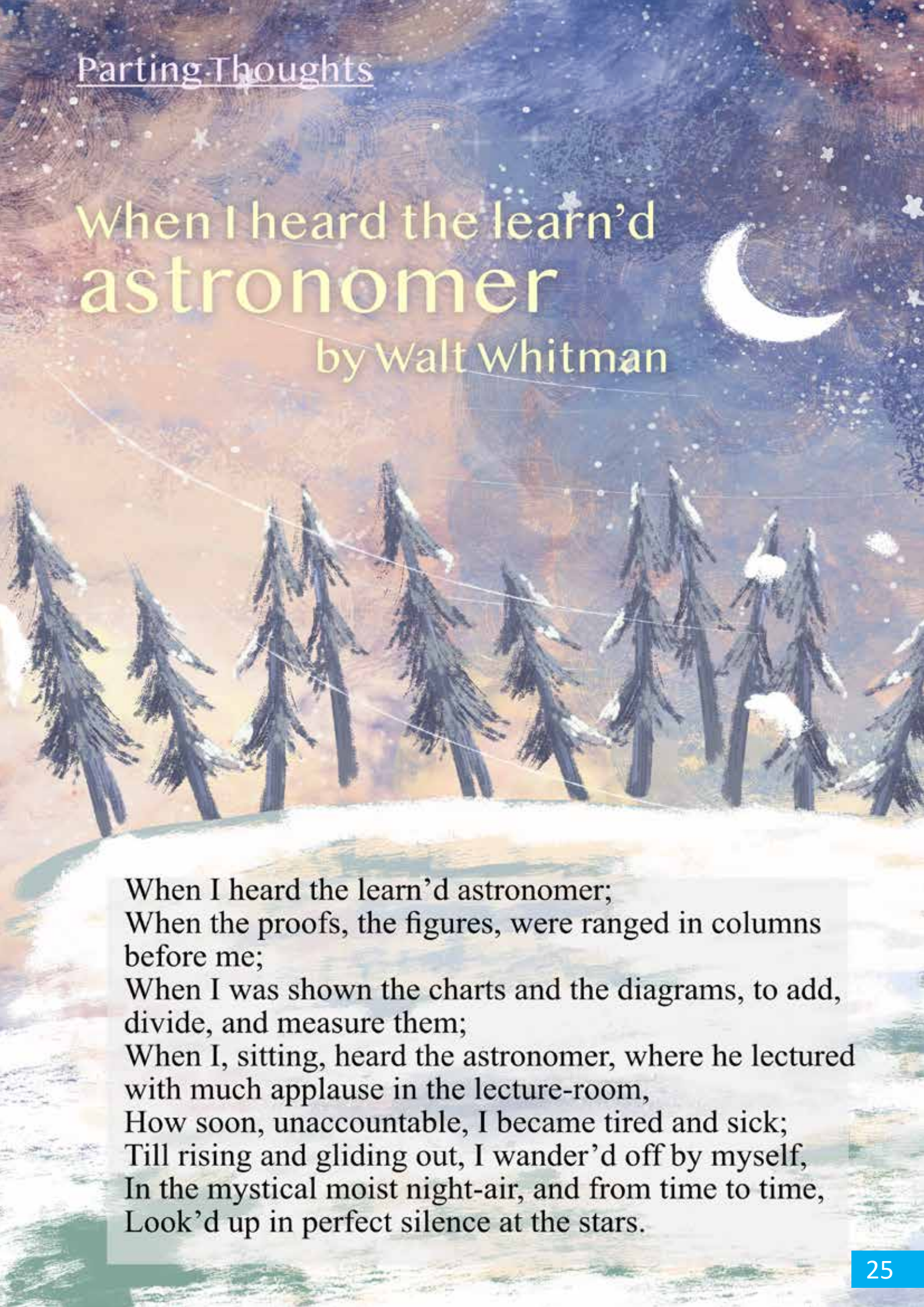
touched people with his kindness and generosity and expects nothing from anyone, including her, and how he is truly happy with his lot in life, she falls in love with him, and the spell is broken: Phil is finally released from the time loop.

The film is charming, funny, and heartfelt, with great performances from the cast, but that does not explain the breadth and depth of its appeal. We never come to know why Phil gets trapped in the Groundhog Day time-loop, nor how long he spends in it (clearly, it is a very long time), nor why he eventually gets released. The answers to these mysteries seem unimportant. What has captured hearts and minds across the globe is the philosophy in the tale. Even with all the certainty of knowing exactly what comes next, true happiness eludes Phil until he accepts his reality, strives to be the best that he can be, and commits himself to take care of others. He masters the art of consciously repeating things in order to progressively improve as an individual. This is the timeless wisdom of all the great philosophers who suggest we too can come out of our mechanical and habitual 'Groundhog Days', through conscious, selfless action and develop our own capacity for self-transformation. It is a message worth repeating, over and over.

Martin McGranaghan

When I heard the learn'd astronomer

by Walt Whitman



When I heard the learn'd astronomer;
When the proofs, the figures, were ranged in columns
before me;
When I was shown the charts and the diagrams, to add,
divide, and measure them;
When I, sitting, heard the astronomer, where he lectured
with much applause in the lecture-room,
How soon, unaccountable, I became tired and sick;
Till rising and gliding out, I wander'd off by myself,
In the mystical moist night-air, and from time to time,
Look'd up in perfect silence at the stars.

**A Way
of Life**

**Solidarity &
Responsibility**



Universal Knowledge

Philosophy Culture Volunteering

Philosophy

Philosophy, when it is practical, is educational. It helps us to know ourselves and to improve ourselves. To be a philosopher is a way of life committed to the best aspirations of humanity. It helps us to know ourselves and to improve ourselves. To be a philosopher is a way of life committed to the best aspirations of humanity.

Culture

The practice of human values is the basis for a model of active and participative Culture, which brings out the qualities of each person, broadens the horizons of the mind and opens the human being up to all the expressions of the spirit.



Volunteering

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.



It is by practicing the universal values of philosophy that we can deeply transform ourselves and turn our ideas into action.

The practice of philosophy develops self-confidence, moral strength and resilience to face the difficulties and crises of life. It allows us to become an actor of change in our lives and around us.

Our introductory course in practical philosophy offers a series of theoretical and practical classes to progress in self-knowledge, to practice taking advantage of every circumstance in life without forgetting to develop solidarity with others.

For more on our courses, public talks and activities you can contact us:

Mail: info@acropolis.ie Phone: (01) 496 8310

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