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Fear and the Stages of Life

FEATURE

Living Philosophy: How words of Plato and
Marcus Aurelius are relevant today

Do We Need Tradition?



FROM THE EDITORIAL DESK

Dear Reader,

Lurking behind the waves of new strains of the corona virus across the globe, is another illness, more pervasive and far more severe than is noticeable at first glance. For many, apparently guaranteed career paths, and seemingly definitive life plans, have been displaced by deep fears and stressful insecurities rooted in the uncertainty that has clearly surfaced as a characteristic of our times. Although it is evident that this has prompted widespread despair, denial or apathy, a few among the masses face this disease of fear with courage and hope, emerging from the true value of living philosophy, a sincere pursuit of Wisdom, of Truth, and of Goodness.

For these brave torch bearers, it is an opportunity to depart from the false materialistic paradigms that have fed egos and ambitions for many centuries, and which, as humanity, we have blindly taken for granted. Rather than subscribing to the animalistic notion of the survival of the fittest, they show by example what it means to dare to imagine a world in which the privileged happily and generously extend themselves to support the challenged. Instead of power struggles and exploitation, they master the ability to lead themselves, to build governing systems that prioritize the welfare of the collective. Instead of competing to have their voices heard, they produce art and literature that strive to reconnect to timeless archetypes of beauty and harmony.

Traditions world-over have always emphasized this unique capacity of the human being to elevate consciousness, to be motivated by virtues, rather than run the rat race of gathering and securing possessions. It was always essential to educate and transmit how to live a happy and fulfilled life, with the strength and resilience to wrestle the obstacles that life might present; to learn to harmonize oneself with the order inherent in the design of nature.

Let us together also dare to make change; let us together forge new paths, so that those who follow in our footsteps are empowered to give rise to a new civilization. Discover. Awaken. Transform.

Harianto Mehta
Editor

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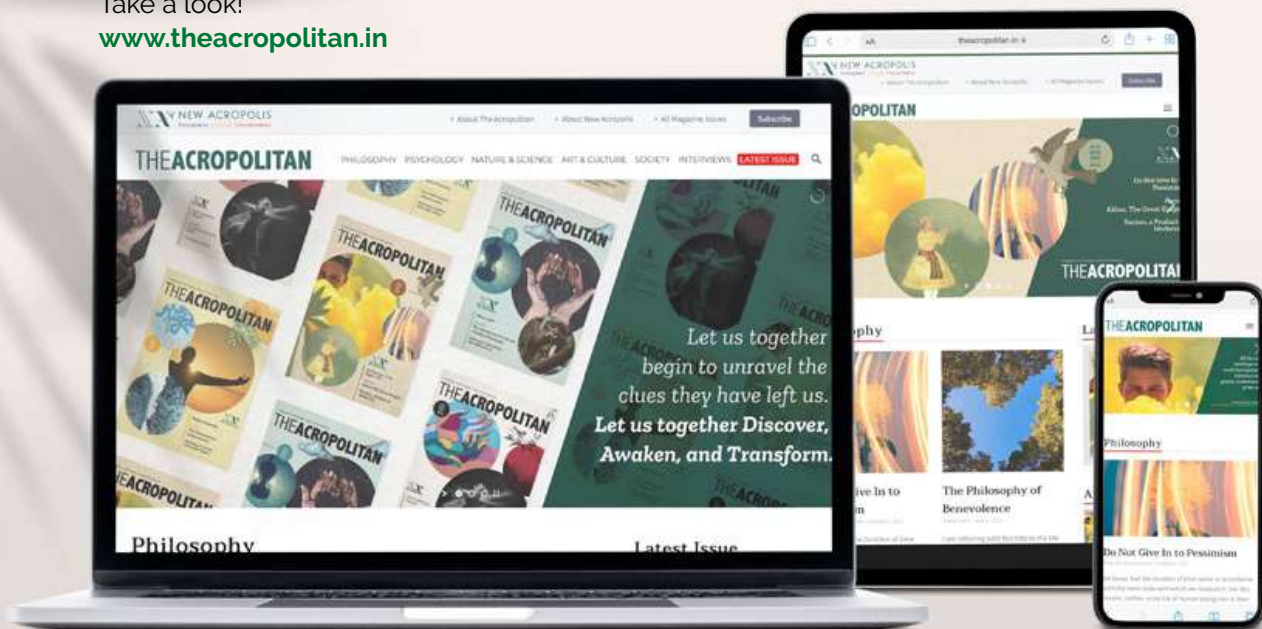
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GROSS NATIONAL HAPPINESS AND THE NOBLE SECTOR OF EDUCATION

In Conversation with Prof. T.S. Powdyel



New Acropolis Culture Circle recently interviewed Professor Thakur S Powdyel, Bhutan's first democratically elected Minister of Education (2008-2013). An educator by choice, conviction and passion, he is respected for moving Bhutan towards fulfilling the country's constitutional mandate for education. As a recipient of numerous international awards such as the Gusi Peace Prize and the Global Education Award, he invested his public office with a rare and chastening quality of integrity, service and selflessness. He has often been described as the most widely foot-travelled education minister in the world.

Translated into several languages, Powdyel's vision of holistic education is described in *My Green School*, which became the basis for the reform strategy adopted by Bhutan's Ministry of Education in 2009. The intention was to enrich the educational experience by addressing the multiple dimensions of life, beyond just the intellectual element. The eight cardinal elements of a Green School, as represented in the *Sherig Mandala*, recognise the importance of the roles of the natural environment, society, culture, intellect, academics, aesthetics, spirituality, and ethics for a holistic educational experience, to achieve the goal of fostering well-integrated, harmonious individuals and society, and ultimately help build a better world.

The Acropolitan: **As philosophers, for us discovering our human potential is an essential attribute of education and is of indispensable value. What does it really mean to be a human being? What makes us special?**

TS Powdyel: We have the special privilege to be born as human beings. In Bhutan, we use the term *milu rinpoche*, meaning 'the precious human being'. Human beings, as the most evolved species among all that we know, stand on a significantly different pedestal, compared to the other beings. The architecture of the human body is different from that of other species. But what stands out more are the other gifts, abilities, capacities and endowments of the human species. We can imagine... We can create... We can wonder... We can marvel... But at the same time, we can destroy... we can damage... and create havoc. We are not here to advocate the latter. We have the ability to think, imagine higher values and ideals. We can aspire to a higher level of actualisation.

With our unique gifts, our unique presence, we can strive to elevate our consciousness to the level of the Buddha, of Christ, of the Prophet, and other great human beings.



Prof. Thakur S Powdyel

We have the special privilege to be born as human beings. In Bhutan we use the term milu rinpoche, meaning 'the precious human being'.

But at the same time, we can degrade ourselves, in our thoughts and actions to a very low level.

One of the most important aspects that distinguishes us from other species is our 'divinity' - the capacity to be greater, more sublime, more enlightened. We have witnessed this in the march of humanity. From our species came the avatars and superior human beings like Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Abraham Lincoln, and great scientist, writers and philosophers. Very often, we forget the sacredness, the sanctity, our sublime nature and get into

actions driven by habits of the mind that are not becoming of the human species. As human beings, we can make the world a more humane, peaceful and beautiful place. No other species has this capacity and gift. Hence, we owe this gift of divinity, humanity, goodness, and goodwill to our societies, our institutions, our nations. We have to apply the intelligence of the human mind, the gift of the human heart and the goodness of actions for the betterment of this world.

We can make ethical and moral distinctions between right and wrong, between truth and falsehood, between good and bad. I believe it is important to honour, secure and celebrate this potential, this dimension of 'divinity' within us, which we *possess*... which we *are*.

This is what the Ancient Greeks, Romans, the great civilization of Harappa and Mohenjodaro, and the ancient Chinese civilisation did. These great civilizations were the fruition of those great ideas, ideals, and dreams that human beings were able to see and elevate themselves to. Their civilizations, their cultures, their discoveries, their inventions, their art, sculpture, music, philosophy, literature, language, history, the humanities, signify the special abilities and qualities of the human species.

TA: Please help us understand the concept



of Gross National Happiness, in the context of the true meaning of progress and development?

TSP: Bhutan, the Bhutanese people, and the world need to recognise and offer our gratitude to the fourth King, His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck, for conceiving and proclaiming to the world this unique vision of a holistic and sustainable development model that he called Gross National Happiness (GNH). It marked a significant departure from the conventional notion of development measured by Gross Domestic Product (GDP) which His Majesty perceived was a unidimensional, highly reductionistic, and utilitarian method. Such a measure of development takes into account only one factor - the material or economic factor - which is highly inadequate and unreliable to give a sense of the holistic development of society because life is varied, subtle, beautiful, multi-layered, multi-dimensional, with so many facets.

His Majesty's model comprised a more holistic and sustainable way, using more variables that take into account not only the material needs but also the deepest needs of a human being that are connected

to well-being. The most profound yearning of human beings across time and space, from continent to continent, hemisphere to hemisphere, coast to coast, country to country - is the achievement of Happiness.

Therefore, we should not reduce the scope of life simply as economic consumers and producers of material goods. Development must include various non-material, non-economic dimensions that make life worthwhile, meaningful and fulfilling - these have to be nurtured and developed.

As social beings, we have the ability to work in teams, celebrate each other, our social values, our sense of belonging and our sense of uniqueness, this ability to work as teams, forge friendships, the ability to trust each other, to be honest and sincere with each other, our capacity to love, our capacity for solidarity, our capacity to volunteer, our capacity to celebrate our moments of joy, and also to mourn and observe moments of silence in times of sorrow. Since the limited and narrow yardstick of GDP cannot capture this beauty and complexity of the entire scope of our development, we believe that GNH will provide a more holistic development paradigm. There are four

The education system has to respond to the deeper urges, impulses and yearnings of humanity. It has to concern itself with the intangibles, while it responds to something as tangible as the market and employment.



factors called 'Pillars' that support the architecture of GNH.

The first pillar is facilitation of a **balanced and equitable sustainable socio-economic growth**. GDP doesn't bother about equity or social balance, as long as there is production and consumption, and an increase in revenue and national income. But for GNH, growth has to be balanced and equitable.

The next pillar is concerned with the **integrity of our Mother Nature**. A sense of honour for its sacredness is needed to define the relationship between the human species and the Earth. This planet is not only home to us, but also to an infinite variety of animals, birds, and other life forms. So to claim that all its resources belong to us and are for us to use, exploit and abuse, is an extremely irresponsible, thoughtless attitude. That is why GNH honours the sacredness of Planet Earth, the soil we walk on, the water we drink, the air we breathe, the oxygen we receive and need, the smells, the sounds, the sights we receive.

We need to celebrate the abundant variety

of the Earth, which our senses can appreciate, and need for nourishment. Today the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has declared Code Red for our Planet. Climate experts are trying to control carbon emissions so as to limit global warming to 1.5°C. But is that going to be possible without a change in human behaviour, without a sense of responsibility?

The third pillar: **our culture**, our traditions, our heritage! All countries and communities have their own culture, a manifestation of who we are, as a people, society, as a nation. Culture gives us a sense of uniqueness, a sense of identity, a sense of belonging and a sense of personal integrity and respect. A community or a nation without a culture would be a valley of dry bones. The way we dress ourselves, the way we sing, dance, play, cook our meals, our drinks, our sports and games, our art and architecture, our values, our world view, our outlook, our ideals, our hopes, dreams, fears, superstitions, indeed a sense of *who we are*; the tangible and the intangible, the manifest and the subtle, the objective and subjective – these, and more come within the domain of culture.



A sense of honour for its sacredness is needed to qualify the relationship between the human species and the Earth.

If we lose sight of who we are, a time could come when we would become a mono-cultural world with no variety, beauty, or nuances. In Bhutan, we revere our culture - whether it is our big *dzongs*, the fortresses, the temples, the prayer flags, our homes, our songs and dances... Culture is an extremely important part of our GNH vision. In measuring GDP, culture is valuable only as much as the revenue it brings.

The last important pillar is the **quality of governance**. Governance cuts across all the other pillars. A lot of unhappiness in the world emanates from bad governance or mis-governance. As far back as 1627, the great Lama Zhabdrung Rinpoche, who unified Bhutan as a nation-state, said that if a government doesn't look after the welfare

of the people, it has no right to exist. That is why His Majesty was very clear that governance ought to be an instrument of public service and it ought to win the trust of the people by its actions. GDP doesn't factor in the quality of governance and its implications on the environment, the quality of daily life, the holistic growth of humans and non-humans, or the future sustainability of the human race. The vision of GNH not only includes the wellbeing of the present generation, but also that of future generations.

TA: Why do you regard Education as the Noble Sector?

TSP: When I started out, Bhutan was just opening up and one could have joined any



ministry or department in the government. But I chose to work in the education sector. All the ideas and dreams that gave rise to great civilisations of the past could have served as the great foundations of our own civilisation; the religious foundations, the spiritual, philosophical, humanistic, and artistic foundations, could have actually been our strength, to guide us. But in our rapidly technologizing world, rapidly materializing world, rapidly industrializing world, there is a mad rush to run ahead of everyone else, to cover the last mile as quickly as possible before anyone else, and make quick money to succeed in the material world, by becoming as street-smart and clever as possible!

We have to invest in Education with wisdom; education is a lot more than the knowledge and information that is available today. It reminds me of the play *Dr. Faustus* by Christopher Marlowe. Today, we have Faustian science, Faustian knowledge, and Faustian technology, but no Faustian music. Faustus over-reached. But his redeeming quality was his love for Music!

Today, Education has come a long way away from what it used to be when it was called the Noble Sector. I quote T S Eliot:


"All our knowledge leads us nearer to our ignorance... all our ignorance brings us nearer to death... nearness to death, but no nearer to God." But I still believe that education is, and ought to be, the Noble Sector of public good - endowed with the purpose to heal wounds, to heal the broken world, to bring light and elevate. I assign to education the responsibility to take us closer to the truth. We ought to be able to expect that education have the higher goal of making us more sublime, to elevate the minds and thoughts of our children.

Today, Education has lost the capacity of hope for a beautiful world. We use our institutions to respond to the call of the market, factories and corporations. Education has surrendered itself to serve those rather mundane functions. However, commercial enterprises are not necessarily attuned to the enhancement or flourishing of human beings or to human self-actualisation. We, of course, need nations to grow and develop financially. But can financial growth alone make our lives truly beautiful and joyous? Will it make society more peaceful? Is the world becoming more united?


The Education system has to respond to the deeper urges, impulses and yearnings

Culture gives us a sense of uniqueness, a sense of identity, a sense of belonging and a sense of personal integrity and respect.





The most profound yearning of human beings across time and space, from continent to continent, hemisphere to hemisphere, coast to coast, country to country - is the achievement of Happiness.



of humanity. It has to concern itself with the intangibles, while it responds to something as tangible as the market and employment.

Education without values and morality is dangerous; today some of the most qualified people are involved in some of the most destructive activities of the world. While we try to get them to become smart and clever, very few people are heard saying: 'You have to be a good human being...You have to honour your own divinity and humanity...You have to be responsible for a higher cause, for society, the nation and Mother Earth.' Today, our institutions just perform the minimal function to complete the syllabus, to get people to graduate, award degrees and certificates and diplomas... But what happens to these people eventually? What kind of contribution can they make to their societies? If education can't get them to be wiser, then no other sector can do this. That is why education has to be elevated to the Noble Sector that it is meant to be.

Therefore, my concept of a Green School is a strategy to restore this core function of education and engage it as an instrument for the flourishing of noble values within society and humanity.

Education responds to the intellect or thinking mind! But students are much more than just their minds. My biggest concern as an educator has been the preservation of the integrity of the learner. I have to educate the whole person. I cannot just take the child as a potential future employee, or as a potential future revenue earner. That would be a reductionistic and a minimalist, unfair approach. Today's process of teaching and learning ought to address the multiple dimensions that makeup the lives of our children.

Our planet has become an object of exploitation and consumption; that's why



we have these unseasonal rains and floods, tsunamis, forest fires burning millions of hectares, killing and obliterating life in their multiple forms... this is utterly sad. And we have already 'educated' countless number of people all over the world?

However, it is still possible to look towards the future, engage our children, young men and women on the principle of nobility. Arise... Arise... Arise... Awaken and advance onto this different path!

In the context of the Green School model, green is a colour but more importantly, it is a metaphor for anything and everything that supports and sustains life in all its infinite variety, in all its multiple forms. The preservation and celebration of life therefore, is a prime principle of education. And when

we build our schools, institutions, and our curricula, we need to ensure this true goal of education and learning is present.

So we can have a green school, a green home, a green parliament, a green judiciary, a green executive, a green legislature, green diplomacy, green business, green industry, green planning, green mining, green orientation, green mental habits, green thoughts... anything that supports life.

For me, education is twice-blessed - it blesses those who give it and those who receive it.

Education is an important holder of our dreams, of our beliefs, and of our ideals. Its re-affirmation and re-assertion as the Noble Sector ought to lead us across to the sunnier side of the street and redeem humanity! △△△

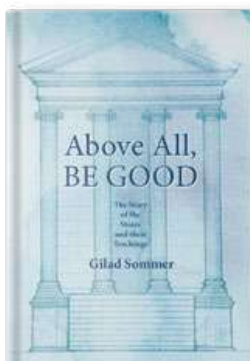
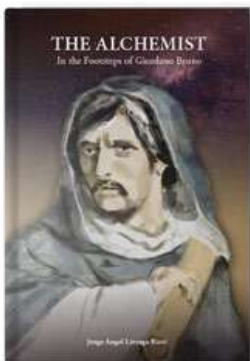


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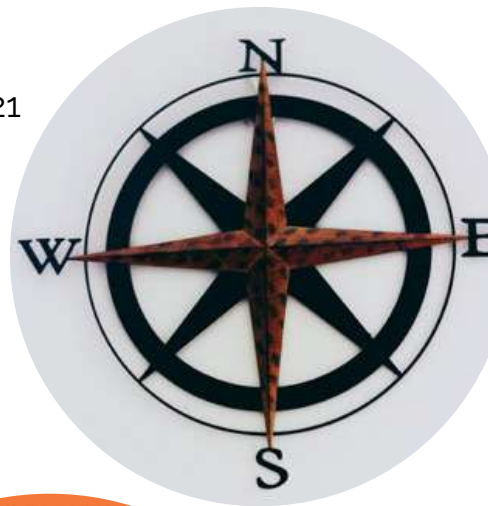


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LIVING PHILOSOPHY:

How words of Plato and Marcus Aurelius are relevant today

First published in ***The Indian Express*** on 18th Nov 2021



By Trishya Screwvala

Philosophers through the ages have constantly reminded us of this underlying universal principle that we are a small but integral part of this web of life. "That which isn't good for the hive, isn't good for the bee," said Marcus Aurelius.

As we begin to step out after almost two years of being largely confined to our homes, the occasion of World Philosophy Day today offers an opportunity to reflect on the challenges we faced, and the value and need of philosophy in these unprecedented times.

The word Philosophy comes from the Greek words *philo* (love) and *sophos* (wisdom). To be a philosopher, therefore, is to yearn for wisdom, to always aspire to follow truth. The contemporary idea of philosophy as an intellectual pursuit then, seems to have lost the very essence of what philosophy stood for. If we look at the greatest philosophers of all time, those who dare to live for their ideals, even at times at the cost of their own lives, we see that their words, far from being abstract or theoretical, are possibly even more relevant today. This is because wisdom encompasses universal principles, which, unlike knowledge or technology, can never become outdated. So what can we learn from these courageous men and women, who opened a path in order to help us live better today?

In times of uncertainty and continuous flux, where entire systems and ways of life that we took for granted have been completely shaken, Philosophy can direct us towards stability. The famous stoic philosopher Marcus Aurelius said "You have power over your mind – not outside events. Realise this, and you will find strength."

In the wake of challenges, we usually tend to devote most of our time and energy trying to change what is out of our control – be it situations, circumstances, or the opinions of others. But the simplicity of Stoicism is a strong reminder to recognise and accept what is not in our control, and to dedicate our efforts towards what we can change.

Today, with our gaze so fixated on the external, we tend to look for





inner peace in outer comforts. But externalities, by their nature, will always change. Real inner peace comes not from unchanging circumstances, but in learning to count on the stable aspect within us.

As Plato says, "The first and greatest victory is to conquer yourself". The path of philosophy is a path that can direct us inwards, to recognise that our real battles, and therefore the source of our solutions, are always internal.

Paradoxically, it was our enforced isolation over the last two years, that taught us how inherently interconnected we are. Never before has it been so apparent how individual actions in one corner of the globe can have an undeniable impact on the collective. Our actions impact not just each other, but all beings on our planet, even planet Earth itself.

Philosophers through the ages have constantly reminded us of this underlying universal principle that we are a small but integral part of this web of life. "That which isn't good for the hive, isn't good for the bee," said Marcus Aurelius. Just as each organ in our body has its own individual function, but always towards the wellbeing of the whole, each of us has a role, and any action that is not in the benefit of the collective, ultimately cannot benefit the individual. Only when we truly learn to recognise that we are not separate from nature but a part of this one life, can we positively alter the way we consume, interact and live. In a world of increasing divisiveness, where we tend to define ourselves by our external differences rather than our common inner humanity, this is perhaps one of the biggest lessons that we can take.

And finally, philosophy can teach us what it means to be human: one who strives to live in the light of ideals.

Aurelius, even as emperor of the powerful Roman empire,

In times of uncertainty and continuous flux, where entire systems and ways of life that we took for granted have been completely shaken, Philosophy can direct us towards stability.



regardless of his circumstances, wrote daily reflections on how to use his role, responsibilities, obligations and every action as opportunities to better himself. Plato implied that what defines us as human beings is the higher potential within us. In his famous Chariot Allegory, Plato presents the human soul as a charioteer with two horses: one tending upwards to the divine, and one inclined downwards to matter, and suggests that the purpose of living is for the soul to grow wings and conquer its true nature.

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As human beings we are constantly waging an inner battle between our strengths and weaknesses, our vices and virtues. But the glory of the human condition lies in our freedom to choose to continually strive towards the good, not only for ourselves but as a contribution towards a better world.

The glory of the human condition lies in our freedom to choose to continually strive towards the good, not only for ourselves but as a contribution towards a better world.

Perhaps, to be truly human is to be a philosopher: to love wisdom and to live in accordance with its principles. Philosophy is not a field of study, nor is it a profession. It is a way of life: to live with a deeper understanding of the nature of things, and a sense of responsibility, joy and wonder for life. $\triangle\triangle\triangle$

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FEAR AND THE STAGES OF LIFE



By Carlos Adelantado Puchal



*The man stops
being a child when
he begins to
accept the reality
that surrounds him.*

We live in a world of lasers, particle accelerators, satellite image transmission, mainframe computers and microchips, and many other things so unique to this era.

At the same time, however, we live with our desires, passions, defects and virtues, with our universal and timeless fears, typical of every human being and of all times.

And it is quite true that each period has its exclusive fear. As the Nordics feared that the skies -when the skies were the Heavens - would fall on their head, or as medieval man feared to cross the forests at night, or sail the oceans for fear of witches, dragons and abysses, so does today's troubled pacifist fear that some madman will press the red button.

However, there are fears that have always seemed to be part of the human being and his psycho-genetic baggage; they accompany the human being from the cradle to the grave, throughout his life, in all the seasons of his life. Thus, it seems that chronological ages participate more than we think in the psycho-mental processes related to fear.

Childhood, adolescence. Fear of reality.

It is obvious that a child lives in a different reality, where an elongated stick can become a riding horse, or a shack, poorly concealed with branches, a wonderful and secret palace. It is also obvious that for the adolescent everything is possible. At that age there is a solution for everything because everything is known or believed to be known.

From this point of view, we too currently live in a child-society that thinks it knows everything and is afraid to confess that it doesn't know some things, because it needs to assert itself. We don't want to see reality. We are afraid to confess that we do not know with certainty what is the Aether, what are matter and energy, that is, these

things which make up the material universe and form the Triad of Science. We are afraid to admit that the Neanderthal man, with his brain, would have been able to go to college. We are afraid to admit that the Big Bang theory does not satisfactorily explain the origin of the Universe.

But the man stops being a child when he begins to accept the reality that surrounds him, and one fine day he realizes that in order to live he has to work, that he is irretrievably balding or that his girlfriend has left him for someone else.

Adulthood. Fear of losing what we have

This is a social fear that assails us insofar as we believe that what we consider ours may be in danger, and since in childhood and adolescence very little can be possessed (or one is unaware of what one has and what it is worth), this fear is typical of the age of adulthood.

Our society acts quickly to instill a sense of ownership, so that citizens learn that "the more you have, the more value you have!" And gradually the fear of losing the prestige achieved, the reputation gained, and finally, the fear of "what will they say", appears. Thanks to this fear, so widespread throughout the world, one of the most terrible and ruthless monsters is today being well nourished and is enjoying excellent health: rumour.

This monster was described by the Roman poet Virgil in the following words:

*"Rumour, compared with whom no other is as swift.
She flourishes by speed, and gains strength as she goes:
first limited by fear, she soon reaches into the sky,
walks on the ground, and hides her head in the clouds.
A monster, vast and terrible, fleet-winged
and swift-footed,
who for every feather on her body has as many
watchful eyes below, as many
tongues speaking, as many listening ears.*



**What is truly
ours are those
things that
depend on us:
judgments and
opinions, acts,
movements,
desires...**

**There are fears
that have always
seemed to be
part of the human
being and his
psycho-genetic
baggage; they
accompany the
human being
from the cradle
to the grave,
throughout his
life, in all the
seasons of his life.**



*She flies, screeching, by night through the shadows
between earth and sky, never closing her eyelids
in sweet sleep: by day she sits on guard on tall roof-tops
or high towers."*
(Aeneid IV, Virgil)

Is there a solution to this fear? The Stoics believed so. The solution is to know how to differentiate our true assets from those that are not. What is truly ours are those things that depend on us: judgments and opinions, acts, movements, desires... and we cannot include those things that do not depend on us in the inventory of our goods: material goods, reputation, dignities and honors.

Old age. Fear of the unknown, of the different, of the new

And fear of death... which is also in a way the fear of losing what we have and the fear of reality.

We are old when we reject, from the outset, the new, the different.

That is how racism and intolerances appear.

It would really be interesting to promote a pedagogy based on courage, and not so much on the fears and weaknesses of the human being. Although, as Plato taught, fear and courage are closely linked, hand in hand, and this is reflected in the Platonic definition of courage: to know what to fear, and to know what not to fear. $\triangle \times \times \triangle$

Carlos Adelantado Puchal is the International President of New Acropolis International Organization

DO WE NEED TRADITION?

By Gilad Sommer

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Tradition is a living and versatile force, which is not only needed, but is essential to the development and sustainability of human civilization.



The word 'tradition' comes from the Latin trans + dare: deliver, give across. It refers to the transmission of experience which lies at the base of every established civilization.

Today, however, tradition has become a synonym of something which is old-fashioned and obsolete, nothing more than an interesting relic of the past to be put in a museum.

Nevertheless, tradition is a living and versatile force, which is not only needed, but is essential to the development and sustainability of human civilization.

Why is tradition important?

Let us look at some examples.

Parenthood, for example, is not a novelty. Thousands of generations of human parents have raised children on this planet, and yet today, every parent is required to reinvent the wheel.

Opinions on education differ from one person to another, and every few years there is a new book or method in fashion that claims to know the right formula for raising a healthy, successful and happy child. But beneath all these words, in the end, nobody knows anything for certain.

Thus, every parent tries to work with some common sense, and in general follow some learned opinion he identifies with, or just does what everyone else does.

Trial-and-error is the new style of parenthood.

But what happened to the experience of thousands of generations of parents?

Societies have come and gone, civilizations peaked and sunk under the waves of time. And yet, every politician today tries to build a society from scratch with new reforms and revolutions that will last exactly until the next politician will come with his own reforms.

Progress and change are the new leadership style, as the societies of the past are often portrayed as conservative, primitive, autocratic and ignorant.

And yet, these are the civilizations that left us the Pyramids and Stonehenge, Plato's Republic and the Roman code of law, and even the words we use.

Where is the experience of the thousands of leaders, politicians and wise-men who led our human societies since the dawn of humanity?

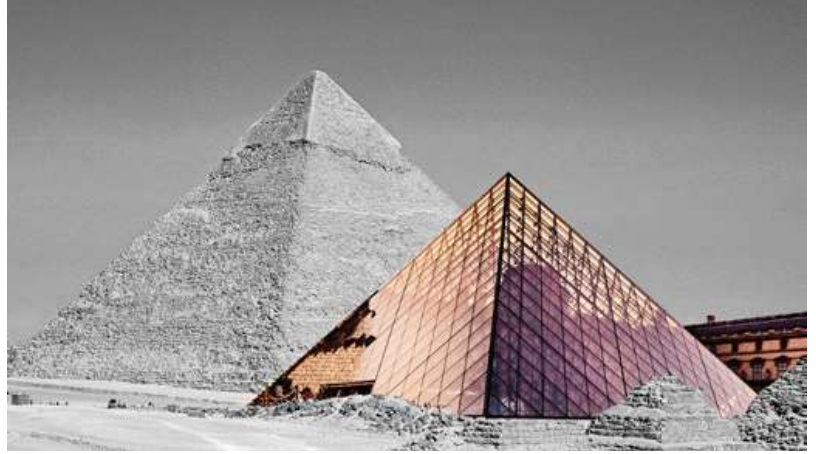
Every artist today feels the need to reinvent the laws and meaning of art. Originality and innovation have become the new art style. And what do we have to show for it?

Painted urinals, twisted metal objects, unidentified mechanical noises.

And yet, people are still in awe of Michaelangelo's David, the Pharaon statues of Luxor and the Greek Parthenon, hundreds



***Where is the
experience of
the thousands of
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and wise-men
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since the dawn of
humanity?***



and thousands of years after their creation.

Where will Duchamp's toilets or Jackson Pollock's so-called masterpieces be in a few hundreds of years from now?


Where then is the experience of the thousands of artists and geniuses who have transmitted the archetype of beauty for generations and generations?

When one travels from one place to the other, it is very useful to have a map charted by past individuals who have already crossed the same route.

Tradition is like the layers of the pyramid of human civilization, built by the bricks of experience; it would be smart to use it as a base for the new layers our generation is tasked to build.

This does not mean that the people of the past knew everything, and that we should stick to old forms, regardless of their usefulness or relevance. But we should also not throw away everything the past holds in store, for the sake of doing it our way. Those who are adventurous will always find uncharted paths to discover.

Life is about balance. Neither innovation at all costs nor conservation at all costs is beneficial. With intelligent discernment we can extract the useful and the wise from the past, and make it a part of our present and future, because what is wise is always wise.

Tradition is like the layers of the pyramid of human civilization, built by the bricks of experience; it would be smart to use it as a base for the new layers our generation is tasked to build. Otherwise, we not only belittle the efforts made by those who came before us, but we will also not leave anything worthwhile to those who will come after us. 

Celebrating culture with a philosophical essence.

The New Acropolis Culture Circle explores the varied expressions of culture through a series of intimate and interactive sessions, in an attempt to revive the spiritual essence that forms the basis of all classical art and culture.

Culture could be seen as a way of life, governed by ideals and transcendental values such as the pursuit of beauty or truth. You could perhaps say that culture is the civilising force that allows for the development of the human potential, and it is imprinted in the way we eat, dress, and speak; it directs our arts and crafts, and is glimpsed in our ceremonies.

We could view classical art, as well as the diverse aspects of culture, as a form of the ongoing education and transformation of the human being, with the purpose of awakening human values. Classical traditions seem to treat culture almost like a sacred ceremony. Moments immersed in art and in our cultural traditions perhaps create a brief opportunity to glimpse the best version of ourselves, to tune ourselves with nature, with life, with what is beautiful, good, and true.



Rekha Bhardwaj | *Indian classical singer:*

"New Acropolis, a school of philosophy that shares a love for wisdom and how to live life more meaningfully with like-minded people. The New Acropolis Cultural Circle organises monthly events on culture with a philosophical essence. I enjoyed sharing my reflections, on how music has shaped me and my life into being who I am."

Tara Kini | *Indian classical singer and teacher:*

"New Acropolis Culture Circle is doing sterling work in not just supporting heritage artforms, but making them accessible to all, through carefully constructed dialogues and demonstrations. The meticulous attention paid to each programme makes each session worthy of archiving to build a library for future use."



Our past speakers include:



Chintan Upadhyay | *Dhrupad Exponent*

"Wherever I sing, is a temple for me."

Sudha Murty | *Author, Philanthropist*

***"Aa no badraaha kartavyo yanthu vishwatahah-
Let noble thoughts come from all directions."***



Arzan Khambatta | *Sculptor, Artist*

"Sketching has taught me to breathe between the lines."

B.V. Doshi | *Architect*

"Architecture is about living together & celebrating life."



Come be a part of our circle of like-minded people!

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While online, our subscription is now free of cost.

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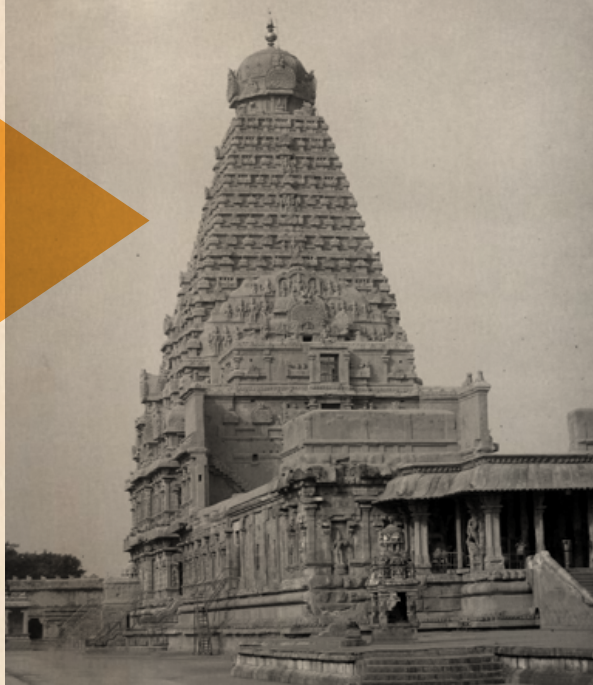
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THE SCIENCE OF SPACE – VAASTUSHASTRA

By Sashikala Ananth



As a student of Sri V Ganapati Sthapati, and then from her association to the School of Architecture of Madras University, for over 30 years Sashikala Ananth has been investigating the classical Indian science of architecture, known as *Vaastu*, combining both textual knowledge and practical field application. She has distilled her experience in her books that include *The Penguin Guide to Vaastu* and *Pocket Book of Vaastu*. **The following is a synthesis of a conversation about this ancient genre that New Acropolis Culture Circle hosted with Sashikala ji in May 2021.**

My Tryst with Vaastushastra

When we were in our 20s, my husband, myself and about 15-18 of our contemporaries were deeply influenced by Shri. Dharampal one of the greatest sociologists of recent times. He inspired us to dedicate a decade of our lives to study the Indic traditions and bring it back to the mainstream. He told us, "Either you run behind the tail of the West, or you go back into your own past and become masters." We chose the second. We had to

take the trouble to learn traditional wisdom from an expert so that it would not get lost, or get commercially manipulated.

Historically, Vaastushastra goes back to the Mohenjo Daro and Harappa period, which is conservatively estimated around 3000-4000 BCE. As with all traditional wisdom, the practice came first, and the text itself followed much later. Reconnecting to Vaastushastra in its original form is very important because unlike other traditional subjects like Ayurveda and Yoga, Vaastu has been sidelined. After I went to study with Ganapati Sthapati in 1982, I found that no college of architecture in India teaches Vaastushastra, though it is the oldest living system of architecture in the world. So it was a huge responsibility to study it and make it available for the contemporary mind. I was the first woman to learn it, and in the last 15 years, I have been able to teach it to a lot of students of architecture.

The Vishwakarmas

The traditional practitioners of Vaastushastra are called Vishwakarma. The community is divided into five categories:

- **Manu**– they make hand tools, weapons, agricultural implements, and kitchen tools
- **Maya**– they are the carpenters, boat builders and the Rathakara, and makers of moving vehicles
- **Tvastar**– they work with copper and bell metal and make utensils and containers
- **Shilpi**– they are stonemasons are sculptors
- **Visvajna**– Goldsmiths and jewellery craftsmen, as well as ceremonial ornaments used in temples

At one time, these five sub-groups looked

► Every object occupies a space and it has a relationship to that space.

after the design of the entire environment throughout the subcontinent. In the colonial period, however, with western education, they were deprived of their building license. Thus in the last 200-300 years, the traditional system has been side-lined, to be used only in the building of religious places.

Connection between Disciplines

Every traditional subject is connected to the other. The disciplines bring together inner and outer practices. *Vaastu* is the relationship between the object and space. Yoga is the subject which deals with the self, the inner space and the ability to respond to the outer space. Ayurveda deals with personal wellness and harmony, food and healing. Unless the three of them come together and converge, we cannot have balance or harmony, neither in the self, nor in the context we inhabit.

This interconnected nature of reality was included therefore in the Vishwakarma teaching methodology. What did the *Parampara Shiksha* teach the apprentices? They had to study all the allied subjects; to understand Vedanta, recite the Vedas, work with the dancer, the musician - to understand the *Rasa* of these subjects. *Rasanubhava* means to be able to experience with enormous amount of savouring, such that you stay with the feeling for a long period of time. And skill-building included drawing, sculpting, etc.

They felt the material. They touched the stone, the brick, the mortar, the earth, the wood, the metal and so on. They had to study the *Vaastu Shilpa Shastra*. Usually, they worked in the yard during the day, and studied with the master in the evening.

Foundations of Vaastushastra

Bhoomi Prathama Vastu

Bhoomi Prathama Vaastu

The Earth is the first Object
The Earth is also the first Space

Vaastushastra is also known as *Vaastu Shilpa Shastra*, where *Vaastu* refers to the built form and *Shilpa* refers to the individual embellishing elements, such as sculpture or other ornamental art work. There are two critical words contained in *Vaastushastra*: *Vastu* and *Vaastu*. *Vastu* can mean to reside or to *locate* an object. When that object is placed on my palm, the palm becomes the *Vaastu*, the two or three-dimensional space. Together they are combined to form the built environment, or the body of any object which encloses space. Hence, any object, placed in a space, becomes a *Vastu* and a *Vaastu*. Every object occupies a space and it has a relationship to that space. Every object is enclosed in an envelope, which in turn itself becomes an object enclosed in an envelope.



A Holistic Perspective

What is the nature of land that we relate to when we build something on it? Or when we grow something on it, when we stand on it, when we walk barefoot in the garden on the grass? What is it that is being picked up by our bodies? What is it that is picked up by the seed which becomes a tree; the essential unseen energy coursing through the earth, capable of creating, supporting, and nurturing life? When we build with a certain respect and responsibility towards the energies that are in the land, we can create something that is capable of offering wellness and prosperity to the user.

Another important aspect of Vaastushastras is *Taala*. It is the same word in music and dance, as well as in sculpture and architecture. *Taala* means rhythm, order. Anything that is rhythmic in nature is capable of being proportionately in a state of balance. In music you call it the relationship between sound and silence. In architecture it would comprise relationships between form and space, light and darkness.

The ability to blend together various polarised experiences in an orderly manner is *Taala*. In architecture, it is very critical.

Then there is *Bhanga*, which means the shift or flexion in the body. An erect standing posture is known as *Samapaada Sthaanakam*, with a straight line that runs from the top of the head to the base of the feet. But when the body starts moving through dance, everything is mathematically positioned. The most classic example is that of the image of Lord Nataraja, in which every part of the lord's body, starting from the distorted figure He is dancing on (*Avidya*, a form of misapprehension, wrong knowledge), everything is in proportion. The central axis which runs through from the top of the head to the base of the feet has the body shifted away from it.

The rhythmic modular component used in architecture is called *Padavinyasa*. For example, a temple is laid out in a modular manner. The basic unit is the *Garbhagruha*, the sanctum. Everything else is laid out



in multiples of the size of the sanctum, including the open spaces. This is why when you walk through a temple town, there is a feeling of inner quiet and inner balance; what you see is very rhythmic and it affects the mind in an extremely beautiful manner.

The Kailasa Natha temple is an extraordinary achievement because it has been carved out top-down, from a rock mountain, and required unbelievable skill. People have always wondered where they took the stone that was removed from the outcrop. There seems to be no evidence of it having been taken anywhere. This quality of work can only be done by trained artisans who are able to hold the ratios and proportions in their mind, in an embodied manner, because they didn't make life-sized models. Also, it means that the team worked extremely efficiently. The one who was cutting, the one who was carrying, the one who was shaping the tools, the one who was assisting or marking, had to have worked in a very synchronised manner. They would have had around a 1000 workmen on the site. Feeding them, housing them, managing the systems, must have been a remarkable feat.

Impact of Vaastushastra

Vaastushastra has had a strong influence on *pooja*, ritual worship. Any image fashioned for the sanctum, all the attending deities placed in the temple, their proportions, and the ratios created in the temple, the sacred walk...all of it is meant to create an inner experience for the observer. When one walks through the *Gopuram* (the entry-way), one sees the *Dhwajasthambham*, the flagpole, which represents the chakras in the body.

The devotee goes to the *Dhwajasthambham*, touches the base, which represents the Mooladhaara, the root chakra, and says to the divine, "May you awaken my *Mooladhaara* so that I may touch my spiritual higher state." And then one walks around the temple, feels things, smells, tastes the water that is given, listens to the chanting, and finally when one comes to the *Garbhagruha*, in the flickering light of the lamp, there is a possibility that one might have an inner experience, a *Rasanubhava* within oneself.

At that point, after having completed the *Pradakshina* (circumambulation) around the temple, one does an *Atmapradakshina* (circumambulation around one's inner self), because within us is the *Jeevatma*, being awakened by divine resonance. So, you say *thank you*, and go around yourself. And then one returns to the *Dhwajasthambham*, to offer *Namaskara* (ritual bowing). This is part of the ritual and the temple is designed to accentuate it.

Similarly, you have the *Yantra*, or *Mandala* in Buddhism. A *Yantra* is a two-dimensional geometric engraving on a metal plate, which is also mathematically accurate and is capable of evoking certain energies within yourself and the space.





Furthermore, a typical South Indian village house always houses a *Tulasi* (holy basil plant) at its centre. Every morning at day break, after drawing the Kolam (decorative designs drawn using rice flour paste) on the outside, the lady of the house, waters the *Tulasi*, removes a few of its leaves, and puts it into the drinking water of the family, or into the food - both are acceptable. And then she lights the lamp to start her daily routine. This attitude of relating to the land, the plants that are good for the soil, all of this is part of Vaastushastra.

► **Every aspect of the traditional wisdom has two sides: there is the rational side, and there is the mystical or spiritual side.**

Vaastu for Urban High-rises

The moment you go away from the Earth, the natural connection is lost. It leads to certain forms of anxiety, sleeplessness, stress, digestive problems, and so on. You can't change the reality of high-rises in cities. But through a process called *Chikitsa Vaastu*, you can recreate an experience of the Earth.

The Inner and Outer Elements

Every aspect of the traditional wisdom has two sides: there is the rational side, and there is the mystical or spiritual side. Mystical means the capacity to look at things in an abstract manner. The former correlates with the linear, logical, cerebral aspect, while the later correlates with a cyclical system, like the way *Kaala*, or time, is looked at in *Sanatana Dharma*. On the one hand, we have the need for tangible evidence: anything that is not physically visible, we cannot see. We also have the emotional impulsive aspect which says, *I feel, therefore I know it exists*. Then there is the side of us which says, the *ordinary is real, the extraordinary is a lie*. But there is also the fact of our own experience, or *Anubhava*, which says the *extraordinary is part of our life*. Even while you have the ordinary going on, the extraordinary is capable of bursting forth.

On the one hand the parameters must be clear. But parameters can also be deceptive, as we all know. Ambiguity is therefore a part of all experience. So, these two aspects, like two plates on a balancing system, exist simultaneously. There is a combination or a blending of the two. △△△

To know more about Sashikala Ananth's work, visit <https://ritambhara.org.in/>

WRESTLING: THE ART OF GRAPPLING WITH LIFE'S CONFLICTS



By Vineet Lalan

"The art of living is more like wrestling than dancing"

-Marcus Aurelius

We tend to use the term 'grappling', at times, to describe a certain struggle to fight, control, or deal with conflicts and challenges in life. Interestingly, this is a technical word originally used in the martial art form of wrestling, which involves grappling holds, throws, takedowns, joint locks and pins. A wrestling match is a physical competition between opponents, who each attempts to gain and maintain a superior position by either pinning down the opponent, or securing submission from him/her to claim victory. There are different styles of wrestling including folk style, freestyle, Greco-Roman, catch, submission, judo, and sambo, among others, and it seems that it was universally practiced through antiquity.



The origins of wrestling go back thousands of years. Babylonian and Egyptian reliefs show wrestlers using holds which even present-day athletes continue to use. In Mesopotamian mythology, the hero Gilgamesh established himself after wrestling Enkidu. In Ancient Greece, wrestling was one of the sporting events in the Olympics, and Homer also mentions it in The Iliad. Additionally Greek mythology celebrates the rise of Zeus after a wrestling match with his father, Cronus. Both Hercules and Theseus were also famed wrestlers. In the Book of Genesis of the Old Testament, the patriarch Jacob is said to have wrestled with God, or an angel, while in the Indian epics Ramayana and Mahabharata wrestling is associated with heroes like Hanuman and Bheem. Arabic literature depicts Muhammad as a skilled wrestler, defeating a sceptic in a wrestling bout. Shuai jiao, a wrestling style originating in China, has a reported history of over 4,000 years.

We can highlight few key principles from the art.

Constant Engagement with Life

Unlike punching, kicking or the use of weapons which can be employed from a distance, wrestling requires that opponents maintain direct physical contact at all times. Early in a wrestler's training, one is taught to maintain this engagement, which is more essential than winning or losing. It follows that when a wrestler disengages, out of fear or from being overwhelmed, it is regarded as counter to the spirit of wrestling. Perhaps there lies in this an important lesson for life. When one is unafraid to engage with life, no matter what lies ahead, and despite the fear of the

When one is unafraid to engage with life, no matter what lies ahead, and despite the fear of the unknowns, the insecurities, or the inertia, we gather an attitude and inner strength to ensure we face life with a spirit of victory.

unknowns, the insecurities, or the inertia, we gather an attitude and inner strength to ensure we face life with a spirit of victory. From this foundation, we can approach the challenges and obstacles of life in a better way.

Grappling with Conflict

The unique features and energy of each opponent means that no two wrestlers move in the same way. There is constant exchange of energy; sometimes we give (lead) and sometimes we receive (follow), and this is a classic characteristic of life as well. One must

always persevere to find the right move and momentum, to overcome each obstacle. If we know our strengths we can bring them forward when needed, and we can learn to absorb life's lessons with each fall, rather than disengage. This we need to practice every day, in order to develop ourselves and learn the art of grappling in challenging moments, rather than avoiding, escaping or getting stuck with our challenges.

Life: Resistance and Flow

The Chinese Yin-Yang symbol signifies the harmonization of duality. Yang is the masculine, hard and active energy. And Yin is the feminine, soft, gentle and receptive energy. Wrestling is built on the foundation of achieving the right balance between these forces while in movement, with the aim of gaining an upper hand to overcome the opponent. Hence, when the opponent is giving more resistance, a good wrestler will flow until the right junction to reverse the energy, and vice versa. With this, even a lighter wrestler can overcome a heavier opponent. The wisdom of when to resist, and when to flow, is a key to living life with more harmony and happiness. When we encounter conflict, we sometimes resist to the point of



The wisdom of when to resist, and when to flow, is a key to living life with more harmony and happiness.

becoming rigid, or yield to the point of giving up. It is important to learn to engage with the right movement and the right strategy to overcome each challenge in order to live more freely, despite circumstances.

Develop a Stance

In wrestling the starting stance is called a 'Tie-up'. Every feature of a stance reveals a wrestler's identity. For example, if a wrestler's legs are spread too wide, it means that he is focussing on stability, at the cost of mobility. Similarly, one's orientation, priorities, values, and attitude towards oneself, towards others and towards life comprise our stance in the battle of life. Without this clarity, a person is perhaps unprepared for a just fight. Developing our own stance is to form our foundation, our identity, as a human being.

This connects with discovering our human qualities and relying on them; for example, to enter a fight with the spirit of altruism, or to enter an unknown situation with the spirit of courage and adventure.

Using the Opponent's Force

Grappling holds are an essential strategy to leave the opponent little choice but to give up. This skill is mastered by understanding the opponent's force and using it against him, when the opponent attacks. When faced with a challenge, we can turn it into an opportunity by using the challenge to grow. Although we can't control what an opponent will do, or what life might throw at us, we can always choose our response to it. That makes all the difference! For example, in times of limitation and adversity, great innovations have been made.

Harnessing Inner Strength

One of the more noble ways to secure victory is by pinning down an opponent's body on the ground for a few seconds, barring the opponent from the ability to lift a shoulder.



Inner strength stems from values like courage, persistence, determination, etc. In life, these values matter more in the face of challenges, than external strength and material resources

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This requires brute strength: the wrestler dominates to such an extent that the opponent can't rise back. To translate this to life, there is a need to use our inner strength. This inner strength stems from values like courage, persistence, determination, etc. In life, these values matter more in the face of challenges, than external strength and material resources. Hence, we need to rely on inner strength which we can harness and express rather than external strength which is not always reliable to overcome a challenge.

To conclude, there are a lot of life-lessons we can extract from the art of wrestling that reveal a different, more empowering, way to look at and engage with our daily challenges. Developing the attitude of an ideal wrestler within us can help; to always engage with life and develop oneself by gathering experience of applying the right tools and strategy, to deal with, and overcome every conflict in life. △△△



PUBLIC EVENTS **NEW ACROPOLIS MUMBAI****Live Authentically Event Series****Sat
15 Jan**Interactive
Workshop
at Mumbai
Centre***6:00 - 8:00 pm****Register Here****IS OUR COMFORT ZONE REALLY COMFORTABLE?**

Many of our choices are directed towards staying within the comfortable confines of the familiar, avoiding change as much as possible. Is the seeming safety of our comfort zone a source of freedom or another limitation? Join us as we start the New Year with a spirit of adventure, and explore how living more freely, fully and authentically is only possible when we dare to step into the unknown.

**Sat
5 Feb**Interactive
Workshop
at Mumbai
Centre***6:00 - 8:00 pm****Register Here****ART OF CONCENTRATION**

It is all too easy to get swept away by the expanding to-do lists and the constant rush against time, that we lose our ability to bring our most precious contribution to our actions and interactions - our presence! Perhaps developing the art of concentration can help us rise beyond the clutter and constant changes, allowing us to bring more depth, focus and stability to daily living.

**Tue
15 Feb**ONLINE
Theatrical
Panel
Discussion**7:30 - 8:45 pm****Register Here****DARE TO BE AUTHENTIC: LESSONS FROM GREAT WARRIORS**

Warrior traditions of the past, be it the graceful Japanese Samurai, the relentless Spartans, or the brave warrior clans of the Indian tradition, led with unflinching courage and strength of character in the face of any battle or circumstance. Join us for a theatrical interview style panel discussion as we meet heroic warriors from different traditions, to learn how we can bring a warrior spirit in our lives today.

**Sat
12 Mar**Interactive
Workshop
at Mumbai
Centre***6:00 - 8:00 pm****Register Here****KNOW YOURSELF:
LIFE BEYOND THE DAILY GRIND**

Is there more to life than our everyday routines? Is my measure of success based on others' expectations or my own authentic choices? Join us as we dive deeper to better discover ourselves, our nature, and the purpose and privilege of what it means to be human.

*Events at Mumbai Centre/Pune Branch will be held in-person, circumstances permitting. Double vaccination certificates will be required to attend in-person, as per Government regulations. Seating will be on a first-come-first-serve basis to ensure social distancing.

PUBLIC EVENTS **NEW ACROPOLIS PUNE****Sat
15 Jan**Interactive
Book Reading
at Pune
Branch***6:00 - 8:00 pm**[Register Here](#)**ART OF INNER DEVELOPMENT:
LESSONS FROM BUSHIDO**

It is said that at their prime, the 'Samurai', the warrior people of Japan, were driven not by greed, hate, or lust, but by a beautiful code of conduct called Bushido, that required them to develop virtues such as Justice, Courage, and Mercy. In fact, their expert skill is often attributed to their inner strength of character. Can we revive the much relevant 'spirit of Bushido' in our times? We will read excerpts from *Bushido - The Soul of Japan* authored by Inazo Nitobe to explore how we can bring out our best human potential in the face of our daily challenges.

**Sat
29 Jan**Interactive
Workshop at
Pune Branch***6:00 - 8:00 pm**[Register Here](#)**KNOW YOURSELF:
LIFE BEYOND THE DAILY GRIND**

Is there more to life than our everyday routines? Is my measure of success based on others' expectations or my own authentic choices? Join us as we dive deeper to better discover ourselves, our nature, and the purpose and privilege of what it means to be human.

**Sat
5 Feb**Interactive
Book Reading
at Pune
Branch***6:00 - 8:00 pm**[Register Here](#)**SEARCH FOR PURPOSE: PLATO'S
ALLEGORY OF THE CAVE**

Plato's famous *Allegory of the Cave* offers profound lessons on how daring to step outside of our comfort zone can enable us to encounter deeper truths relating to the meaning and purpose of life. Join us as we draw inspiration from Plato's timeless wisdom and explore how we can live with more authenticity and fulfilment in our times today.

PUBLIC EVENTS **NEW ACROPOLIS PUNE**

**Sat
12 Feb**

Interactive
Workshop at
Pune Branch*

6:00 - 8:00 pm

[Register Here](#)



ART OF OBSERVATION: SEEING LIFE MORE DEEPLY!

What we pay attention to directly impacts the way we understand the world around us. To learn to truly observe allows us to read between the lines - to look into the depths of things and perceive what is unseen. Join us for an interactive talk as we attempt to sharpen our ability to observe, in order to bring more depth and creativity in our interactions with ourselves and our surroundings.

**Sat
12 Mar**

Interactive
Talk at Pune
Branch*

6:00 - 8:00 pm

[Register Here](#)



USING CIRCUMSTANCES TO GROW

How can our spirit not just survive but thrive, through tough times? When we are able to outgrow the mentality of a victim and enter the arena of everyday life with the spirit of a victor, we can use the most trying times to forge an invincible Self. Join us for this interactive session.

**Sat
26 Mar**

Interactive
Workshop at
Pune Branch*

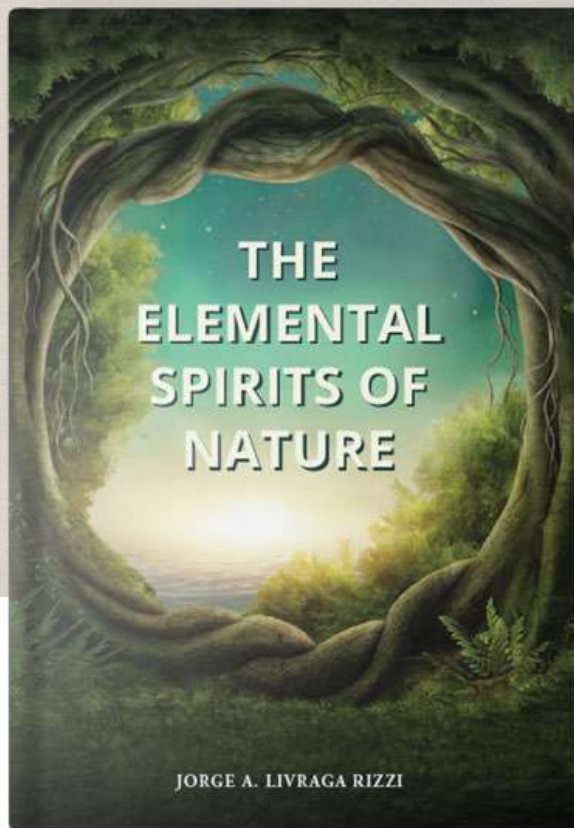
6:00 - 8:00 pm

[Register Here](#)



ART OF CONCENTRATION

In the year 1600, one of the great Tibetan Lamas decided to draw a special picture in order to teach his disciples about the Art of Concentration. What is the important role of concentration according to Tibetan Buddhism, and what can we learn from this special drawing that can enable us to live a more fulfilling life in today's world? Join us for this interactive talk inspired by Fernand Schwarz's book *Concentration and Inner Awakening*.



BOOK RECOMMENDATION

THE ELEMENTAL SPIRITS OF NATURE

By Jorge Angel Livraga Rizzi

Read about angels, fairies, elves, gnomes and other Elemental Spirits of Nature; open up the mind to discover a marvellous world of beings which are not "supernatural" but live on their own plane of existence, even though most people today have lost the ability to perceive them.

PREVIEW EXTRACT

WHAT ARE THE ELEMENTS?

Traditions which stretch back over thousands of years tell us that the Cosmos is constituted on the basis of a single Element. It is the concept of a unity prior to the dualities of the intelligible world and their subsequent harmonization. But if the Archetype is one, then the substance must also necessarily be one in essence. This is what Democritus was referring to in his writings when he spoke of the "atom" as the indivisible "part" which supported the cosmos. It is not the so-called "atom" which Man has been disintegrating for the last half a century that the ancient Greeks were referring to. What we nowadays call an "atom" (which literally means without parts and is therefore indivisible) is no more than a micro-molecule which is itself made up of many different elements. The atom of the classical thinkers is beyond anything that is known by modern science.

But on the manifested plane where we move and act and which we are able to perceive and understand, we can affirm that there are four Elements: Earth, Water, Air and Fire. These four form two interpenetrating generative crosses, since Earth and Air have a horizontal movement, whilst that of Water and Fire is vertical. Thus Earth is made fertile by Water and Air is made fertile by Fire. These two crosses give rise to vital elements which are characterized by their force and their beneficial effect for man: material fertility and energetic fertility.

These four Elements are not to be understood as physical Earth, physical Water, physical Fire and physical Air, but as much larger groups, which are represented on an exoteric level

by these four physical elements. They also correspond to the four lower planes of Nature: Earth to the Physical, Water to the Energetic, Air to the Psychic and Fire to the Mental. In alchemy they are the four strata which are formed inside the Athanor. At the bottom Salt; in the middle, the two forms of Mercury, and in the upper part, the Sulphur crowned by the Phoenix of Fire, a form of the fifth Element which in its natural state is impossible to find since, due to the fact that it is still in its formative stage, it is very unstable.

The four Elements influence the qualities of things, so we may hear people talking of plants of Water, stones of Air or of zodiacal signs of Fire, though not always with a knowledge of why they are so described. In fact, the four Elements are like four fundamental forces or musical notes in our system of Nature, within its overall tone of Dynamic Unity which enables these four Modes to interpenetrate one another and to be built into the architecture of the Divine Plan which rules us.

WHAT ARE THE ELEMENTALS?

They are forms of life within the Elements. It is obviously very difficult to explain the basic characteristics by which they can be defined, since their bodies are not on the strictly physical plane where our visual and auditory senses function, or, to put it in a better way, as their bodies are not in the right "position" for us to see them, although they may be in some way on the physical plane; and so we tend to think of them as the empty imaginings of primitive men or the idle fancies of children.

The bodies of these life-forms exist on the



Pranic Plane and not below it. However, as the planes are not neatly divided by any razor-sharp definition, but are linked in an almost infinite series of steps, and as the circumstances of Nature are not always the same (with variations which we know like day and night, the seasons of the year, height, depth, greater or lesser static charge, different atmospheric pressures and different temperatures, rapidly changing states in the atmosphere such as concentrations of Water, Ozone, etc., and apart from all these terrestrial influences those of the heavenly bodies, especially the Sun and the Moon), on certain occasions the Elementals can descend to a level of materialization which makes them more easily visible. But even in such favourable conditions they are not normally perceived.

Let us give an example: a stiff sheet of paper held twenty-five meters away from where we

are standing, in full daylight, would be perfectly visible if one of its sides were presented at an angle perpendicular to our own angle of vision. But if it were held in profile and perfectly still, or was moving at the same rhythm as whatever formed its background, it would in practice be invisible for anyone who was not looking for it. Someone who denied the existence of that sheet of paper "a priori" and made no effort to look for it, would be unlikely to see it. This would explain – although we shall look into this question more deeply later on – why the pages of ancient books, clay tablets, papyri and parchments, are full of references to the Spirits of Nature and why on the other hand the cultural elements of our materialistic and "positivist" form of civilization contain no such references.

It is difficult to explain the existence and presence of the Spirits of Nature to people living in a society which is capable of denying that plants and animals which we see, touch and devour have souls; to those who see nothing more in the loving fidelity of a pet animal, or the vivifying presence and company of a tree or a rose-bush, than forms and colours which they attribute to chance or to more or less invented genetic laws, devoid of any metaphysical attribute. So although this work is not aimed at the few, and is not "elitist" in intent, being freely offered to all, the writer is fully aware that until the materialistic attitudes inherited from our immediate past have been very substantially changed, many readers will deprive themselves of its benefits by no choice other than their own.

HOW FAR BACK DO RECORDS OF THE ELEMENTALS GO?

According to esoteric teachings, the

Elementals have been present on the Earth for longer than Man himself. Whether as inhabitants, guardians or integral parts of the Elements, they have existed as manifested forms ever since the world has existed. When this was no more than a mass of radioactive gases and incandescent matter, the Elementals of Fire watched over it; when the stable gases appeared in their chemical composition and in the age of the great winds, the Elementals of Air helped those incipient gases to evolve and to form strata above the recently consolidated earth's crust so as to provide the best possible conditions for the forms of physical life that were being planned. When the gases became heavy and fell as the first waters which then almost covered the entire planet, giving rise to the first truly material forms of life, the Elementals of Water worked on and gradually modified the primitive appearance of the liquid element, at that time highly charged with heavy matter in suspension, which gave it an almost colloidal quality at the deepest levels, while the high waves almost touched the low, compact clouds with their foaming – but not yet white – crests. Later on, like huge slow – moving tortoises, the continental plates emerged, watched over by the Elementals of Earth who gave them conditions of fertility and helped to populate the enormous forests which enabled higher life-forms to develop and made possible the formation of Humanity itself.

Everything in the Universe has a Guardian Spirit. The Planet also had one and it was obeyed by the hierarchies of Spirits of Nature when the days and nights began. It still has its Guardian Spirits and will continue to have it until it disappears. It is the Dhyān-Chohan of the Tibetan Book of Dzian, the Resplendent Soul which governs

the Earth, or the Anima Mundi of the Romans (since it “animates” and moves, and is not to be confused with the Planetary Ego or Spirit of which the physical Earth would be the body).

This knowledge is extremely ancient and we do not know when it originated. All the sources that we have – from the above-mentioned Tibetan book to every other reference from antiquity, mention these processes which, seen from the particular angle of our own scientific viewpoint may sound just like stories to keep us awake at night.

But the Elementals, like the ones whose very smallness and weakness enables them to have contact with humans, also fill the pages of the old books. From Sumer to Egypt and from China to the little that we know of the cultures of America and Black Africa, passing through Polynesia and amongst the inhabitants of the circumpolar regions, and reaching down to the centuries which preceded us in the civilization of Europe, the Spirits of Nature have played an important part in those ways of life which were less contaminated and more natural than our own.

Stories about Genies, Gnomes, Undines, Elves and the whole immense range of Elementals fill the History of Mankind in such a way that without them neither its development nor the telling of it would be the same, as we can confirm in so many instances from the Myth of Enkidu and Gilgamesh to Homer's Odyssey, the Sagas of Arthur and Merlin, or the elementals which taught Isadora Duncan to dance and inspired the glassware of Gallé.

Until very recently, their representations



adorned the prows of ships, and they are still portrayed in hundreds of statues throughout the world, whether in parks, or on rocks overlooking the sea.

Grandmothers (...in the times when children were children, adults were adults and old people were old people, whether they held university degrees, noble titles, or were illiterate) used to tell their little grand-children about the Spirits of Nature. Delightful tales whose characters were undines, gnomes, fairies and elves, described with their characteristic forms and life-styles, their prodigies and apparitions.

Even the Catholic belief in a Guardian Angel who looks after little children until they reach the age of seven, has much older roots than Christianity itself, and from Arcadia to America it has always been believed

that children, because of their purity and vulnerability, had a Guardian Spirit which saved them from many accidents, protected them from wild beasts and helped them to find their way home when they were lost.

The most curious thing about all this is that in the art forms of such dissimilar peoples, the Spirits of Nature are represented in a similar way. Likewise, in traditions, one hears of the same Elemental beings in 15th century Central Europe as in the heart of India in the 2nd millennium B.C.

If we consider that many of these human groups never knew each other nor had the least suspicion of their mutual existence, the many points of coincidence that we find in their descriptions of Elementals force us to rule out any possibility of chance. It is evident that all of them saw the same or very similar things and that they approached them in the same ways. They attracted them, conjured them, repelled them or feared them... but always in the same way. This can only confirm the fact that all of these different people were confronted by a single type of phenomenon and that, by the logic of their common human nature, they treated them a similar way - just as, when confronted by a river, all of them made bridges, some more, others less sophisticated, but bridges all the same. And if all of the ancient peoples have spoken of rivers and of the bridges that they built over them, it is evident that the rivers were a real presence. The same is valid for the Elementals, which were for all the ancient peoples a real, presence, whose echoes are still audible in our times through folklore and ancient writings.

NEWS SPOTLIGHT

► Philosophy ► Culture ► Volunteering

► Celebrating World Philosophy Day (Oct 21)



As part of the celebrations hosted in 60 New Acropolis member countries around the world to commemorate this UNESCO Initiative, New Acropolis, India, threw light on how to live

ephemeral pursuit, and proposed that by focusing on developing inner strength through a moral way of life, we could learn to make the choices that could help us experience a more sustainable form of happiness. Then on World Philosophy Day, 18th November, New Acropolis presented PHILOSOPHY FOR LIVING: SEEKING SOLUTIONS FROM PHILOSOPHERS IN HISTORY. In an on-line interactive, theatrical format, characters playing Plato, Marcus Aurelius, and H.P. Blavatsky shared the essence of their teachings on how to make philosophy practical, by living it every day. Using simple examples, they showed us how we can transform our society and our world, by transforming ourselves. The session saw



a philosophical life: one that aspires to the highest humanity within us, often exemplified by the greatest philosophers and thinkers of all time.

Leading up to the main event, an online session entitled SEEKING HAPPINESS, on 9th October, acknowledged that the universal search for Happiness has usually been an elusive and



160 participants attend, and ended with a lively and enthusiastic question answer session.

► An Evening Of Music (Sept 21)

On 18th September New Acropolis Culture Circle hosted classical singer and flautist Rasika Shekar, who showcased both Classical Carnatic music, as well as Sufi, Latin and Fusion songs. Having worked with Ustad Ghulam Ali, John McLaughlin, and Shankar-Ehsaan-Loy, Rasika transitioned effortlessly between various genres, singing and playing the flute and drawing audience participation. In between, she explained how, in reflecting the culture it originates from, music allows listeners to explore, interact and come closer to different cultures.



► Architecting Life (Oct 21)

Padma Bhushan Balakrishna Vithaldas Joshi, who studied under Le Corbusier and worked with Louis Kahn, shared his life and experiences with members of New Acropolis Culture Circle on 30th October. Balakrishnaji emphasized the importance of continuous learning, the need to constantly challenge yourself, and the ability to

view a problem as the "mother of new ideas".



► Dance And Beyond (Nov 21)

From her home in Brisbane, Australia, Bharatanatyam exponent Neha Bhatnagar performed online before an audience of New Acropolis Culture Circle on 27th November, showcasing one of the oldest classical dance forms of India. Believing that culture has the power to change the world, Neha founded the Sarvam Foundation in Gurgaon, Delhi, to empower young girls from challenging backgrounds, through dance and yoga. The audience was treated to a performance by the girls of Sarvam Shakti live from their center in Gurgaon. Neha concluded by expressing through dance that we have a choice and we must choose wisely how we live, always reaching for the higher, better part of ourselves.



► Work With Nature Workshops (Oct-Nov 21)

There is no better way for us to deepen our understanding of the interconnectedness of all life than to work with nature, and a community garden in Malabar Hill, Shantivan, adopted by New Acropolis Mumbai, is the venue for an ongoing series of sessions to implement eco-friendly waste management, and plant and nurture new life.

On 26th October, 27 volunteers of New Acropolis Mumbai created 4 composting pits. Divided into 4 groups, they collected leaves, twigs and other green waste, dug the pits, layered soil and leaves neatly into flattened mounds, and covered the heaps, leaving them to slowly and naturally decompose. The activity allowed participants to gain an understanding of the intricate and delicate web of life, where there is no waste or decay, and where death is only a stage of transformation.

On 10th November, volunteers attended to the 4 compost pits by facilitating microbial development and aerobic activity to assist soil formation. The entire morning's work was a practical

demonstration of the role of human beings as an integral, interconnected part of Nature.

On 24th November, while one team of volunteers continued working the compost heaps, turning and aerating the pits, a second group planted kitchen herbs like citronella, lemongrass, mint and tulsi. This immersive activity with the soil, plants, earthworms and insects, brought about a heightened awareness of the natural harmony of Mother Nature.

More sessions are planned to give volunteers the opportunity to experience Mother earth in all her glory, in a tangible and tactile way, while contributing to the neighboring community.



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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.



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.



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