

A Magazine on Philosophy, Culture & Volunteering

# THE ACROPOLITAN



JAN  
FEB  
MAR  
2023



## The Adventure of Living Philosophy

### FEATURE

### The Universal Language of Symbols

Based on the event celebrating World Philosophy Day 2022

Excerpts from an interview with the Honorary President  
of the International Organization New Acropolis







# FROM THE EDITORIAL DESK



Dear Reader,

Curated around the theme of World Philosophy Day that we celebrated in November, this issue attempts to explore the essence of philosophy and its relevance and value in today's times.

We bring to you, in the words of an aspiring philosopher, her discovery of New Acropolis as a school of practical philosophy, and her journey as a part of this community. From another part of the spectrum, Delia Steinberg Guzman, Honorary President of International Organisation New Acropolis, speaks to us about the school and its role today and in the future, as she sees it from her experience of leading it for about 30 years.

We also explore the idea of the universal language of symbols - one that manifests in varied aspects of life such as nature, mythologies, architecture, and much more - as a key that helps us to delve deeper beneath the most visible layers of ourselves, and of life itself. In Giordano Bruno, we see the example of a philosopher, and a life spent on the worthwhile quest of wisdom. We understand from the artist Adam Williamson, about Sacred Geometry as an expression of the archetype of beauty. We learn about Koans, a tool used in Zen Buddhism to encourage the seeker to explore beyond what we can see, hear and understand through our logical minds.

While exploring these seemingly different aspects we see a unified outlook, one that invites us to Discover, dares us to Awaken and Transform.

**Malini Nair**  
Editor





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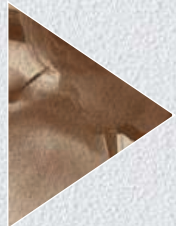
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# THE ADVENTURE OF LIVING PHILOSOPHY

By Trishya Screwvala



Wall Painting, Colaba, Mumbai





First published by  
**The Better India** as  
*"I turned to Philosophy  
 to Find my Purpose and it  
 Helped me Answer Life's  
 Biggest Questions"*;  
 edited by Divya Sethu.

When I left home for college, there was a certain clarity with which I had my life planned out — my career, lifestyle, personal ambitions.

But by the time I graduated, I had far more questions than I had answers. Prompted by an insistent inner voice, I couldn't help but wonder — is this really what life is all about? I started to question what I truly valued, what success meant to me, and how I could live a more meaningful life.

It was then that I chanced upon a flyer of a school of practical philosophy called New Acropolis.

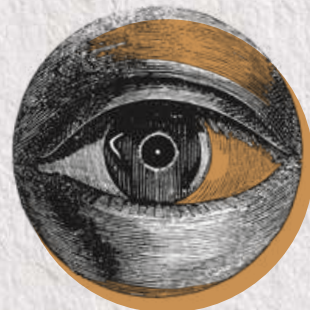
Its Mumbai centre was located just down the road from where I had grown up, but for years, I'd been unaware of its existence. Perhaps life reveals its gifts when we are ready to receive them.

Since then, the ten-year philosophical journey I embarked on has completely changed the way I looked at life.

### **The inherent wisdom in life**

New Acropolis is present in over 60 countries across the globe.

New Acropolis India alone hosts over 2,000 hours of classes, activities, workshops and discussions every year, dedicated to investigating ancient wisdom across civilisations from the East and West. Here, the purpose





is not to learn about philosophers and their philosophies, but to apply universal principles from our shared human heritage in order to live better today and build a better future.

To me, philosophy had always seemed like a theoretical and impractical field of study. But little did I know that the ancient Greek schools of Plato and Pythagoras were always meant to be 'schools of life'. Far from intellectually debating ideas and concepts, they were centred around *living* them.

**The philosophical journey is essentially about — discovering the wisdom inherent in life and in ourselves, through our own experiences.**



The name 'Acropolis' itself refers to the "higher city within us", an idea not so different from 'Hastinapura', which translates to city of elephants and can symbolically be understood as the city of wisdom in the Indian tradition.

This, I learnt, is what the philosophical journey is essentially about — discovering the wisdom inherent in life and in ourselves, through our own experiences. It is not without reason that UNESCO, in 2002, created World Philosophy Day, an occasion dedicated to reviving the value and importance of philosophy in improving our world today, by enabling us as individuals to improve ourselves.





## Philosophy in action

We often look for external solutions to mitigate the challenges of our times, be it our current climate crisis or the rise in divisiveness and war.

Yet philosophers from many traditions constantly remind us that we cannot change society or our systems without changing *the heart* of the systems first, which can only start with ourselves.

***To volunteer is to simply play our rightful role in the world that we inhabit, and it can remind us that we are part of something much larger than our individual selves.***

Can we expect to solve environmental issues without changing the way we interact with nature? Can we expect to live in a just and compassionate society if we don't know how to recognise the forces of separation and prejudice that exist within us?

Here lies the power of philosophy — it enables us to realise that each one of us is part of the challenges we see in our world, and that we all have the potential to be part of the solution.



Building Breakwaters for Saplings, Mumbai.



However, as I learned early in New Acropolis, good intentions alone are not enough. In fact, philosophy without action is not philosophy at all. This is why volunteering forms a core pillar of all activities, with all centres managed and run completely by volunteers.

## *In an ever-changing world, philosophy can allow us to discover a deeper, stabler, and truer reality of ourselves and our world.*

New Acropolis India engages in over 600 hours of ecological, social and humanitarian activities, focusing on fostering individual responsibility towards oneself, society, and nature. Activities include mangrove clean ups, tree plantation drives, wall-painting and beautification activities, blood donation drives, and other community-driven initiatives.

Yet, I discovered that truly volunteering is more than giving back to society for a few hours in a week. Its power lies in aspiring to bring this spirit of service and generosity into all our daily choices and actions.

Volunteering is, therefore, philosophy in action.

It is a practice that continues to teach me to overcome my own selfishness and put the needs of others over my own comfort and preferences. To volunteer is to simply play our rightful role in the world that we inhabit, and it can remind us that we are part of something much larger than our individual selves.



Illustration by rawpixel.com | Image by New Acropolis India



Mangrove Restoration & Awareness, Mumbai.



## 'Who am I?'

In an ever-changing world, philosophy can allow us to discover a deeper, stabler, and truer reality of ourselves and our world.

Questions such as "Who am I?" and "Is there a purpose to life?" have been explored by wise men and women across traditions and can offer some light on how we can live with more authenticity and independence, taking charge and directing our lives in the light of what we choose to value.

Therefore, philosophy gives me hope. It shows me that if we are able to give more emphasis to the common humanity in each of us, to what unites us over what separates us, it can change the way we live, interact, and view ourselves and each other.

The pursuit of philosophy has given me the gift to see my life as a continuous learning process, to search for the lesson in every circumstance, whether positive or painful.


I am truly grateful to be part of a community of aspiring philosophers who come together from different walks of life — with different strengths and challenges — all in the common pursuit of bringing the best of ourselves to each day and humbly leaving our world a little better than we found it. 



Illustration by rawpixel.com | Image by New Acropolis India

Trishya speaking on World Philosophy Day, Mumbai.





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Wed, 15th Mar 7:30pm (2 hrs)

**Course Begins:**

Wed, 22nd Mar 7:30pm

To know more [click here](#)

**Pune Branch**

**Free Intro:**

Mon, 27th Feb 7:30pm (2 hrs)

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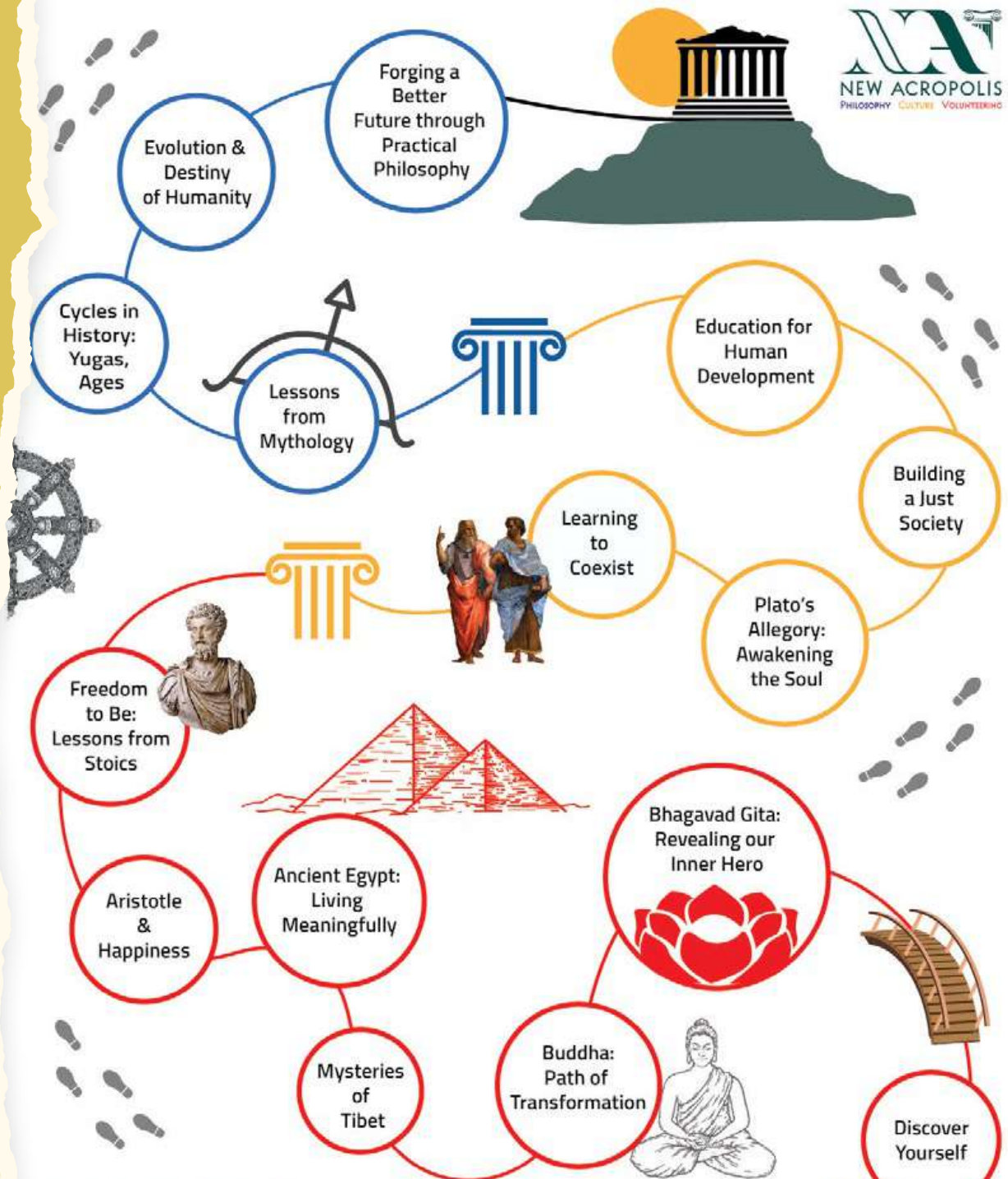
- **Know yourself better:** Your strengths and weaknesses, our potential as human beings, and how you can harness them
- Explore practical tools such as concentration, order and reflection, to **live with more clarity, purpose and happiness**
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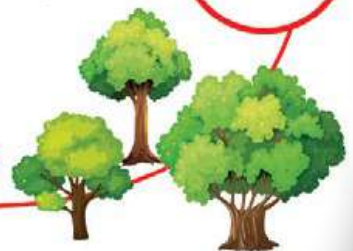


# LIVING PHILOSOPHY

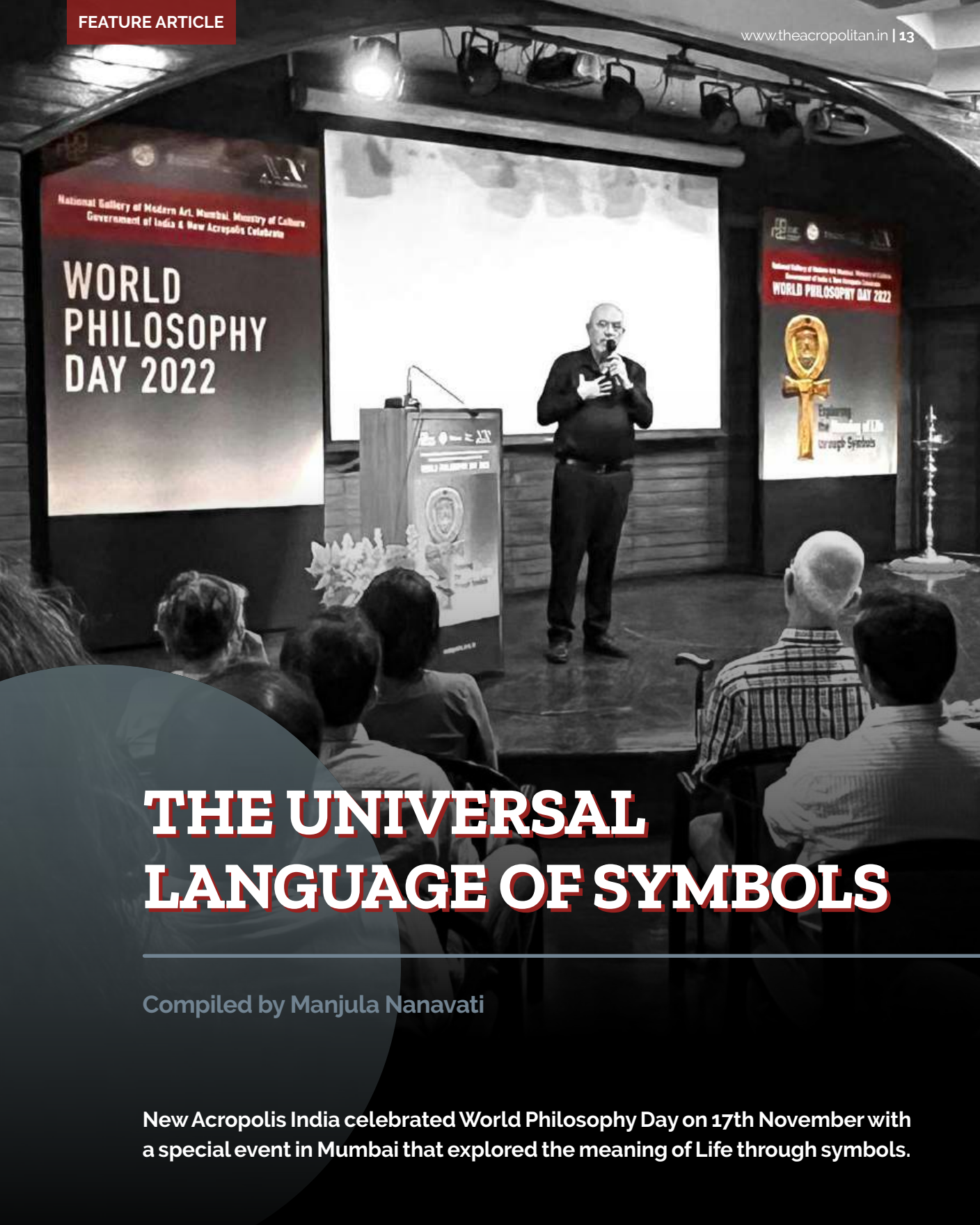
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# THE UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE OF SYMBOLS

Compiled by Manjula Nanavati

New Acropolis India celebrated World Philosophy Day on 17th November with a special event in Mumbai that explored the meaning of Life through symbols.



UNESCO commemorates World Philosophy Day on the 3rd Thursday of November every year, to recognize the contribution of Philosophy as a force of transformation for the development of individuals and societies. To this end it encourages philosophical dialogues, conferences, and workshops with participation from scientists, philosophers and artists from all branches of knowledge, as well as teachers, students and the general public, in order to refine the ethical principles that should guide humanity to build a better world.

As part of the global celebrations that **International Organization New Acropolis** hosts in 400 centres over 60 countries, New Acropolis (India), in collaboration with the National Gallery of Modern Art (Ministry of Culture, Government of India), hosted

a presentation in Mumbai exploring The Universal Language of Symbols through philosophy and art. Yaron Barzilay, Director of New Acropolis (India) and Philosopher-Photographer Pierre Poulain, whose work has been presented in exhibitions all over the world, and who is also Coordinator of New Acropolis (Asia, Africa and Oceania), gave a rapt audience of almost 200 much to ponder, about the richness and depth that life offers us through symbols.

**Below are excerpts from both their separate talks, transliterated from their own words and amalgamated to underline that the Path of the Philosopher and the Path of the Artist in the search to touch the invisible are not so different at all.**

Yaron began his presentation by explaining that philosophy is a means to come closer to wisdom. He made clear the difference between knowledge and wisdom, and explained that *"philosophy is a path to penetrate the mysteries of life. But because we cannot interact with Wisdom and Mystery with words alone, we need to go beyond, and transition from Kama Manas, (the mind that defines by separation and segregation, that sees things partially), to Manas, the higher mind which sees holistically. This is to transition from Duality to Unity. If we operate through our Kama Manas we will be stuck in our assumptions, opinions and superstitions. We need to cross this sea of limited intellect and go beyond, towards Manas, towards the shore of wisdom. **One of the keys to help us achieve this, to go beyond the visible and touch the invisible, are symbols, and philosophy can***

*help us to understand not just the words that give meaning to the symbols, but to unveil the deeper universal significance of them."*

Pierre echoed this when he began his talk: *"There are Universal Archetypes like Justice, Goodness, Truth, etc. Beauty too, is one face of the archetypes. Symbols are a gate that allows us access to the universal Archetypes that we cannot see, touch or hear, because they belong to the Aroopa, the realm of the invisible."* Knocking on the lectern and touching his own arm, Pierre continued, *"These seems quite real to us, and of course they do exist, but they will soon vanish, in a moment in time. They have a beginning and an end. So it is an illusion of permanence in the impermanent. **Symbols are the tool that can help us pierce this veil of Maya, this world of illusion, to perceive what is behind the veil."***



Yaron in his presentation had further clarified, "Symbols are not signs: We all recognize a traffic signal red light as an instruction to STOP but it carries no other meaning than that. Symbols are multidimensional and carry deeper, multiple meanings. They are an offering and a transmission. **Symbols awaken our intuition because they speak to the innermost, sacred authentic part of ourselves.**"

Pierre too in his talk expressed similarly, "My work as a philosopher-photographer is not philosophy, not photography but what I call *Photosophy*: How to take a picture of the visible and through the camera touch the invisible so that everyone can see it. When I touch the archetype of Beauty, real Beauty that is not linked to my opinion and the subjectivity that

Encounter with the archetypes by Pierre Poulain



comes from my persona, when I perceive true Beauty even when my personality doesn't like it, (because it may be that my personality was not educated to like the real Beauty), then I touch Truth, and Goodness, and because the archetypes are all aspects of the ONE, I understand Unity. I feel like I belong to Life, because Life is one: This is the greatness of Art.

An artist stands in the midst between the Archetypes on the one hand, and a work of Art on the other. The artist is thus the channel or medium between the impermanent and the eternal. If the artist is able to put his mask aside, and be transparent, he can allow the viewer to 'perceive' a glimpse beyond the Maya. That is how photography becomes Art: it becomes a symbolic image that contains more than we can see. An image that awakens in us a question. Much like Philosophy. **The answer is not in the photograph. It is within yourself. And the photo becomes the impetus for the search within. The answers are inside each and every one of us: the philosophical process and the artistic process is to reveal the answer.**" Here on earth, we are in 3 dimensions. An image is in 2 dimensions: 2 is the natural link between 1 and 3. That is why symbols work so well as the bridge between the concrete, and the metaphysical.

**Symbols are not signs. They are multidimensional and carry deeper, multiple meanings.**





The Bench by  
Pierre Poulain

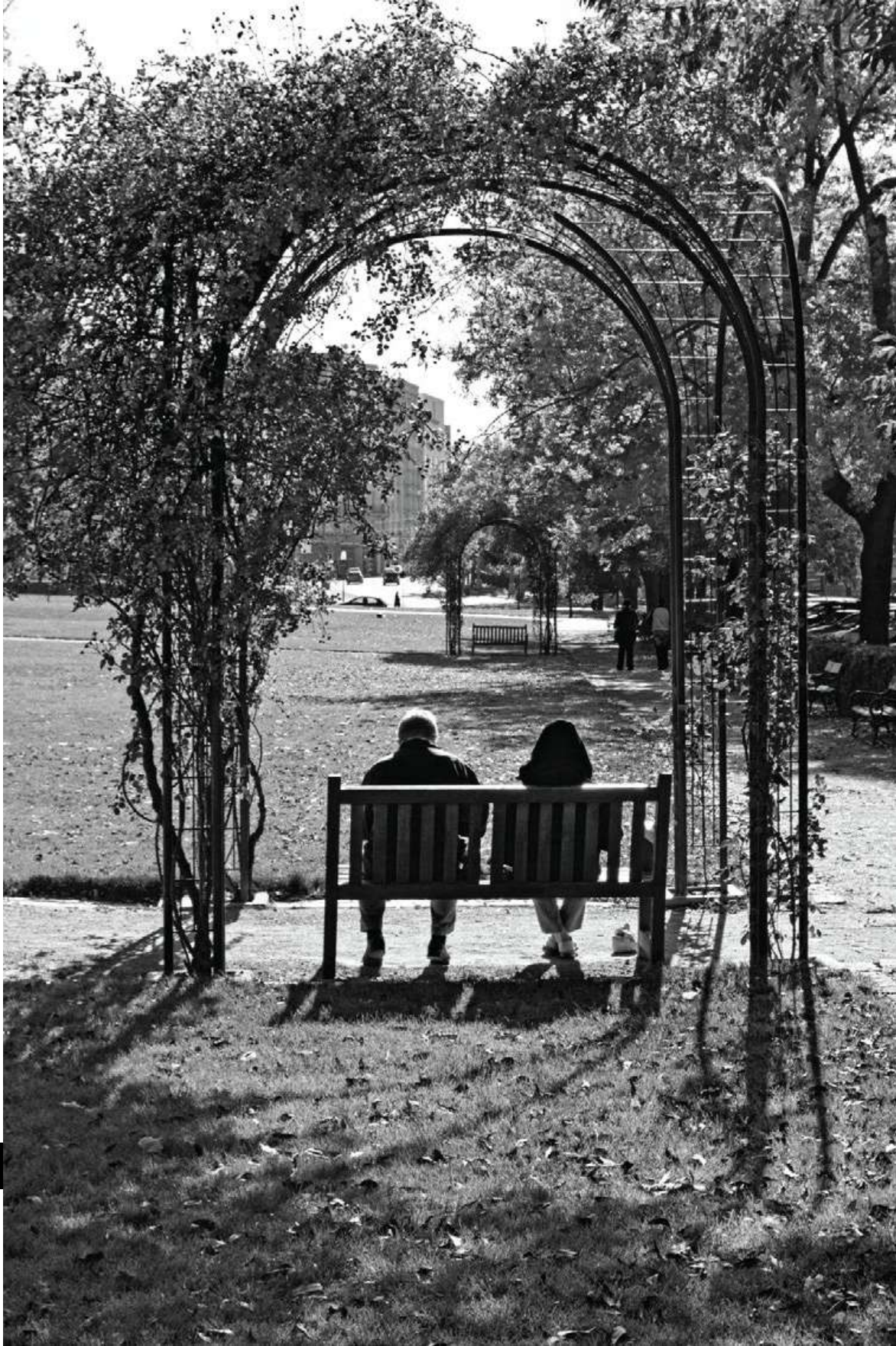






Image by Saliko / Wikimedia Commons / CC-BY-SA-1.0  
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During the course of his talk, Yaron presented slides to show that symbols have existed since man first began to paint the walls of his cave, and since then they have appeared across all cultures and civilizations. Yet even across geographies and epochs there are similarities that demonstrate a universality of meaning. The Tree of Life, for example, is portrayed in various religions and philosophies including the Ancient Greek, Ancient Indian, Scandinavian, Celtic and the Egyptian traditions to name just a few.

Explained Yaron, *"Mythology and Allegories give us powerful and profound symbols such as the Kurukshetra from the Mahabharat, symbolic of the battle within, between light and darkness, or Labyrinths in Greek mythology symbolizing an inward journey to meet our 'animal self', our lower ego. Constellations of stars have been translated symbolically, most universally known as the Zodiac."* **Sacred Architecture in almost all cultures have used elements of space such as shape, dimension, proportion, angle, etc., in the construction of roof, floor, columns etc. to enhance access to the spiritual.**

Pierre in his talk made a similar observation: *"In Egyptian Temple Architecture, the front façade is a huge door. As you enter the floor slowly slopes upward and the roof slopes*

***Mythology and Allegories give us powerful and profound symbols such as the Kurukshetra from the Mahabharat, symbolic of the battle within, between light and darkness, or Labyrinths in Greek mythology symbolizing an inward journey to meet our 'animal self', our lower ego.***

*gradually down. and **finally where the 2 meet, where the sky and the earth are joined, is the place of the Gods: the place where we discover ourselves.***

Yaron had pointed out how we use symbols in formal ceremonies like weddings, (image from ppt of significant moments) as well as casually in our daily life. *"When we hug one another, as*

Image by Rotatobot / Wikimedia Commons / CC-BY-PD  
Image by King muh / Wikimedia Commons / CC-BY-SA-4.0





lovers or brothers or even competing fighters, we bring our hearts together. The raised hand of a Hello, the folded hands of Namaste, all carry a symbolic meaning which we may have lost today, and we need to empower them and fill them once again with meaning". Symbols abound in nature, in repeated patterns from the micro to the macro, for example, the spiral pattern that is revealed in sea-shells, in ocean currents and in celestial constellations.

Quoting Joseph Campbell, he said "Once you understand symbolic things you will see symbols everywhere", but he added, **"to decode them we need to develop an ability, one which we all have."**

Pierre, in his turn amplified this point: "The consciousness of Symbols does not need to be acquired. **Symbolic consciousness is inherent in all human beings.** I believe it is this, maybe more than anything else that is the difference between Man and Animal: We can work with symbols, we can be living symbols. If we develop this ability that allows access to higher levels of reality, **we become the bridge with our feet on the ground and our consciousness in the sky, and we awaken to what it means to be a human being.**

Using Antoine De Saint-Exupery's words "It is only with the heart that one can see rightly. What is essential is invisible to the eye," Yaron during his presentation had underlined that to unveil the language of symbols we need to foster centeredness. **"When we are centred we are able to see with the heart, beyond what separates us, and realize what unites us. Perhaps then we will be able to become a little more conscious, as Rumi said, that we are not a drop in the ocean, but the ocean in a drop."**

**"It is only with the heart that one can see rightly. What is essential is invisible to the eye."**

Antoine De Saint-Exupery

Shedding more light on how photography can relate to Art and to Life Pierre shared, *"I believe in street photography because in a studio everything is structured, planned, arranged and dictated by your personality. Whereas on the street you never know when the right moment will be presented to you, so you must be ever alert, and watchful. You need to put the mental in white, your mind transparent, and you must allow great photography to be offered to you. If you have a pre-conceived idea, in photography as in life, your mind cannot be open to other options, and you close yourself from perceiving every possibility, every gift of life"*.

To have and have not by Pierre Poulain




Yaron ended his talk by concluding: "Our world is full of Symbols. Symbols are the language in which life speaks to us, to show us a deeper meaning than we can tangibly see. They are footprints that urge us to walk, a step at a time, and invite us to discover the path of consciousness."



Sometimes we need to dare by Pierre Poulain

***Symbols are the language in which life speaks to us, to show us a deeper meaning than we can tangibly see.***

*"Truth is one; sages call it by various names,"* the Rig Veda, one of Vedanta's most ancient texts, declared thousands of years ago. And that evening through these two distinct presentations by acknowledged experts in their own fields, we the audience had a chance to understand this experientially: Yaron spoke to us through the voice of a philosopher, and Pierre through the eyes of an artist, yet both with their own individual approach and their own unique examples, shed light on Symbols as a tool to for us to go deeper within ourselves and access the spiritual; demonstrating that in the search for the sacred, the way of Philosopher and the way of the Artist are two paths that lead to the one, eternal Truth. 



Excerpts from an  
interview with the

# Honorary President

of the International  
Organization New Acropolis



## *Introduction*

In 1991, Delia Steinberg took over the presidency of New Acropolis following the death of its founder, Jorge Angel Livraga Rizzi, under whose guidance she had worked very closely over a period of more than 20 years.

She is currently Honorary President of the International Organisation New Acropolis.

Under Delia's leadership, New Acropolis has expanded across the five continents, bringing Philosophy in the Classical Tradition closer to a wide range of people. This development has been implemented through its philosophical, cultural and volunteering programmes, which have provided new approaches while at the same time going deeper into the identity of New Acropolis, as defined in its founding principles. Thousands of Acropolitan members, friends and supporters from all around the world are living proof that the philosophical answers New Acropolis offers in response to the complexities of our times are valid and necessary, since they are based on the values of timeless wisdom, which has enlightened humanity at its most difficult moments.

If we had to highlight a single aspect of her tireless efforts at the head of New Acropolis, it would be her educational and teaching work, through which she





# More than 400 Centres in over 50 Countries

## 40,691 Volunteers worldwide

has developed the curriculum of the School of Philosophy and drawn up programmes of applied philosophy, based on the most profound teachings for life and the inner development of human beings.

She is the author of many works on how to live philosophically, which have been translated into several languages, including French, English, German, Russian, Czech, Portuguese, Greek, and many others.

Among more than 30 titles we can highlight the following: "The Games of Maya", "Philosophy for Living" and "The Everyday Hero".

Alongside these activities, and as a former concert pianist and piano teacher, she chairs the international piano competition which bears her name and offers opportunities for advancement to many young pianists, providing them with her expertise and advice, because, in her view, music is the best companion for the soul.

We have asked Delia to tell us about her experiences of these years at the head of the International Organisation New Acropolis.

Following is an extract from the **full interview** with Delia.

### ***It is clear that we are living in times of great confusion.***

It is very difficult at the moment to find stable values that are grounded in the meaning and purpose of life, which is equivalent to saying that, to a large extent, we lack any future. Uncertainty casts its shadow over today and tomorrow, and this situation particularly affects the younger generations, who lack support and hope.

It is widely known that psychological disorders are on the increase, along with

tendencies to escapism from reality and even suicides. The outlook does not look rosy, unless substantial changes occur, which will not give immediate results. But it is necessary to start as soon as possible.

We must turn to the timeless remedies that have produced their fruits in the darkest periods of history. Even if we refer to the European Middle Ages, which are closest to us in time and most familiar to us, Art in all its facets brought together some remarkable souls and established bonds of Love that gave rise to the Renaissance.

## **All human beings want to know Love, whether they have it already or are searching for it.**

Philosophy is based on love, precisely because that is the root of the word 'philosophy': it is Love of Wisdom, and one who searches for wisdom learns to love everything and everyone.

We could affirm that most people are searching for it and a few privileged people have it. And even those who have it keep searching for it in order to perfect it.

Today it is common to restrict love to sex, forgetting many other planes of expression of the human being, such as sensibility, intelligence and spirituality. This impoverishment of the concept of love makes any kind of union weak and short-lived. However, we all need and are looking for love, especially a love which is shared in spite of difficulties. The fruitless and misdirected search for love leads people to be satisfied with unstable substitutes that create even more uncertainty.

Love is the force that drives us to do things well, in which case it is related to ethics and morality, because it induces us to act in an appropriate way in our lives. In this way, it leads us to peace, tranquillity, fullness and well-being with ourselves and with others. To quote the words of a wise man:



Stage performance based on the "The Prophet" by Khalil Gibran (Brazil), Acropolis News



"We do not know what love really means. We know only the love that is based on attachment and possession.

... the real nature of love is the light from within that reveals the beauty that is hidden in things." (Sri Ram)

What we are interested in is love in its widest spectrum, dedicated to the whole of Nature and, of course, to people. In New Acropolis a person's sexual orientation is not important, because that is a matter for the individual; what we are interested in is for everyone to be able to experience love as "light that reveals the immaterial beauty that is hidden in all things".

## What is the role of beauty in life?

Art brings us into contact with beauty in its highest sense, it brings us closer to harmony and to inner and outer equilibrium. It is true that at times of uncertainty such as those we are living in, there is a tendency to confuse things, to look for what is easiest, what is most exciting and what attracts perhaps because of its ugliness. "Uglism" has become so prevalent that we accept any creation as art, even if it goes against the most elemental criteria of beauty; and it takes a lot of courage to say "I don't like it".

There is no shortage of defenders of uglism as a way of denouncing or ridiculing an unjust society, or one which is too rigid in its concepts. But this is not a constructive criticism; it is not enough to show the ugly, one has to find the truly beautiful.

The "edifying" tendency of this type of uglism follows some of the parameters laid down by Nietzsche:

*"152. The art of the ugly soul. Art is confined within too narrow limits if it be required that only the orderly, respectable, well-behaved soul should be allowed to express itself therein. As in the plastic arts, so also in music and poetry: there is an art of the ugly soul side by side with the art of the beautiful soul; and the mightiest effects of art, the crushing of souls, moving of stones and humanising of beasts, have perhaps been best achieved precisely by that art."*



Promotion of the Self-Awareness Seminar under the Parthenon (Greece-Athens), Acropolis News



38th Edition of the Delia Steinberg International Piano Competition (Spain), Acropolis News

Clearly, this will not help us to make the world a better place. The lack of aesthetics and, on occasions, of morality, even if it seeks to offend an over-conventional sensibility, does not offer an edifying model, nor one worthy of being imitated.

We need to introduce positive elements that decontaminate the consciousness, so that we can cope with all the disasters we are living through.

Aesthetics, combined with beauty and art – a quintessentially harmonious whole – develops a more refined sensitivity and, therefore, sentiments of the same type, as well as ideas that are more purified from prejudices.

What we are aiming at is for the human being to attain greater dignity through their thoughts, feelings and the actions that derive from them, all of which is the product of beauty, balance and harmony. We would like to highlight the value of inner beauty, which is difficult to define, but radiates grace, warmth, intelligence, elegance and charm. And even if these qualities may not be perceptible to the physical senses, they endow those who have them with a great attractiveness.

We have to consider that the perception of beauty is a subjective experience, which varies from one culture to another and one individual to another. And yet, there are works of art that we could well describe as universal and immortal because they go beyond these individual and cultural differences.

### ***In New Acropolis there are different levels of knowledge and associated practical exercises. Can you explain a little more about these levels?***

As in any kind of institution, there are levels, like those we find in universities, schools of education and businesses in general.

Philosophical discernment cannot be provided or understood in a single day.



These levels relate to the indispensable time and forms needed to make the best use of knowledge. In fact, the programme of studies of New Acropolis' School of Philosophy has seven levels with their respective subjects, which are accessed in a progressive manner.

Some subjects require practical exercises to reinforce the theoretical learning; in general these are simple exercises of psychology, memory, reflection, imagination, oratory and others related to our volunteering actions.

## Why a School of Philosophy?

We approach philosophy as a way of life, not only as an accumulation of theoretical knowledge which is not applied in everyday situations – whether difficult or not. Hence the need to understand the practical dimension of philosophy.

Why a School of Philosophy? Because none of the normal schools, institutes or other educational bodies provide valid instructions for life. To put it briefly: no one teaches us how to live, how to enjoy existence or to solve the problems that are constantly arising; we don't learn anything about true fraternity, or about living together in harmony, we lack courtesy and good manners to make an appropriate use of freedom.

## Probationary Course

The programme starts with a course that we call the Probationary Course, which is a name we give to the first level of studies. It refers to a trial period for those who enrol. With a variable duration of a few months, about two or three hours per week, it sets out in general terms the themes that will be developed in the following levels. It provides a trial period for both parties: for those who start the course, so that they can decide whether they are interested in continuing, and for those who teach the course, so that they can assess whether or not the students have passed the subjects.

Once they have passed this introductory course, students receive a certificate of completion. It is then up to each student whether they wish to continue



New Acropolis participates in a civic parade (Samambaia, Brazil), Acropolis News

with the following courses, both at this level and at the subsequent stages.

### **There is also the School of Living Forces**

This is a level aimed at those who, after years of learning and action, decide to go more deeply into their inner development and to support the activities of New Acropolis more directly. This school is also a matter of free choice. It begins with a preliminary theoretical and practical course, and is open to those who show that they have the necessary qualities to access these levels. It is about giving more meaning and direction, more strength to life, and feeling precisely more alive.

In particular, it is responsible for looking after the basic needs of the School of Philosophy, helping with the cultural activities, giving information to people who are interested and carrying out all kinds of volunteering actions, selecting those who can act most efficiently in different situations.

The opportunities for men and women are the same, and the decision to leave these groups is also a matter of free choice.

Participating in these groups responds to a need for human development which includes factors that are not always contained in the levels of study, even though they are not different, except in terms of their application.

### **The School of Discipleship**

This system has been in use since the remotest antiquity, in all cultures and civilisations, in order to establish a correct transmission of the teachings that help human beings to travel the path of life. We have been left with outstanding examples of the disciples who regularly attended the classes of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, to mention a few well-known philosophers. But there have always been sages who gathered disciples around them and dedicated themselves to them fully, while the disciples had to fulfill what was required of them: to want to learn, authentically and seriously.



Meeting with Delia Steinberg Guzman, writer and philosopher (Tirana, Albania), *Acropolis News*





A visit to Aquincum, an ancient Roman city (Budapest, Hungary).  
*Acropolis News*

This level is unrelated to any past or present religion, political ideas, differences of races or sexes, nationalities or social classes, as New Acropolis establishes in its Principle of Universal Fraternity.

The School of Discipleship covers the same teachings as those contained in the programme of studies, but places more emphasis on the development of moral, philosophical and spiritual values.

But it contains one of the greatest goods, which is at the same time the most difficult to develop and to live: the bond between master and disciple. It is a bond of natural and free-flowing transmission, it is love in the purest sense of the concept, since there are no personal motivations or subjective situations that interfere with it.

It is appropriate to clarify who we consider to be masters.

In the first place, we take as a basis the great figures who have stood out in all civilisations, and of whom we have sufficiently valid historical references, whether through traditions or written works. We consider them "great" because of the contributions they have made, not only on an intellectual level, but in their efforts on behalf of the inner evolution of human beings.

Based on this model, the teachers – or "little masters" – who teach in New Acropolis are those who have accumulated more experiences that have been demonstrated over time and proven by what they have achieved in their work with their disciples.

There are masters of art, conductors of orchestras, high-level professionals, and there are also masters of philosophy, following the same principle.

A disciple is one who aims at something more than knowledge or recognised qualifications; they sincerely seek to be better as a person in all aspects, increasing the depth of their consciousness and their sensitivity to the needs of humanity.

Their union with the master establishes a bond that is strengthened by the way in which they integrate the teachings, which, in turn, they will be able to give back to others in the future.

## **Can any member gain access to these different levels?**

As in other institutions of learning, each level and subject requires the student to pass examinations. Once these have been passed, any member can access the following levels, in a progressive and voluntary way, as set out in the programme of studies. These levels are not "secret", but are achieved gradually and by merits.

The whole programme of studies has been legally registered.

Similarly, members are subject to a Constitution which is also registered and conforms to all the legal requirements.

Attached to the Constitution of New Acropolis is a Code of Ethics, which is applied in specific cases of serious misconduct where there has been a contravention of its principles and aims, which may lead to the loss of membership status and, therefore, access to the studies.

Alongside the Constitution and Code of Ethics, there are decrees or rules of an administrative nature; they are regulations that facilitate the best possible coexistence and agreement between those members of New Acropolis who voluntarily take up posts that ensure the smooth running of the institution. These decrees are reviewed and amended annually according to the needs that arise.

## **From your experience over all these years, how do you see New Acropolis in the future?**

To speak of a long term development is uncertain, although, as the fundamental goals are aimed at the evolution of the human being, they are inherently long term.

But we can refer to the short and medium term.



Participation in the Kanagawa Minato Festa 2022 (Yokohama, Japan), Acropolis News






Reforestation on the bicycle path (Mexico).  
Acropolis News

In the short term we have to consider the necessary adaptation to the needs of the times, which are definitely accelerating. The fact of having a new International President for the last two years already indicates the advantages of handing over to a new generation with its own approaches and actions. I would like to emphasise the deep discipular relationship that exists between the new President and myself, which has been strengthened over many years. It is a similar case to the discipular relationship which I myself had with the founder of New Acropolis, Jorge Angel Livraga, who, in turn, and as we have already pointed out, had his own masters, who led him along the path of philosophy in the classical tradition, that is, a practical philosophy.

In the medium term – which depends on the short term – we need to extend our international action to reach the greatest number of people with philosophical and spiritual aspirations, based on a renewed morality.

The world lacks values, many people feel isolated, misunderstood and with a lack of faith in the future. We must show these people new ways of outer and inner development. This requires a reinforcement of our own development and organisation in order to meet these needs: a greater professionalisation of our leaders, a greater expansion of our courses and teachings, of our presence in the media, a more clearly defined presentation of our ideas and an extension of the scope of our actions.

I feel highly committed to these aspirations, in the short, medium and long term, and I have total confidence in those who are responsible for putting our principles and aims into action. 

*This is an abridged version of the interview. The original was published in Spanish in August 2022; **Click here** to watch the video.*

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## THE LOTUS

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This flower originates in the muddy depths, rises through water and air, to ultimately emerge in fiery bloom. This universal symbol expresses the idealist's aspiration to gain mastery over the elements; mastery over the tools available in the creative world, in order to ultimately blossom, and illuminate his own potential.

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A sepia-toned photograph of a person with long hair, seen from the side, drawing a complex, intricate geometric pattern on a large sheet of paper. The pattern consists of many overlapping circles and lines, creating a dense, web-like structure. The person is holding a pencil and is in the process of drawing. The background is a warm, brownish-orange color.

# **SACRED GEOMETRY: IN CONVERSATION WITH ADAM WILLIAMSON**

Compiled by Manjula Nanavati





Adam Williamson is an award-winning calligrapher and sculptor whose permanent public works can be viewed around the U.K. He is drawn to particular shapes and patterns that embody universal principles found in nature, made visible through the hands of craftsmen. Adam has been commissioned by many prestigious clients including Oxford University, Shakespeare's Globe London, Westminster Abbey, to name just a few, and has given numerous public lectures and workshops at leading cultural institutions all over the world.

**New Acropolis Culture Circle had the honour of hosting Adam in an online interactive talk on Sacred Geometry** where he explored patterns, not just visually but to give us an insight into seeing some connection with the whole.

Adam began by sharing his journey and the process by which he found himself on this path.

**Adam:** I've grown up with a father who was a carpenter and parents who were interested in Sufism, and various spiritual approaches and I think I was hard-wired from a very young age to focus more on application and practice. So as soon as I left home I travelled all over the world looking for Master Craftsmen. Though I was initially looking for practical skills, what I didn't realise was that you learn so much from the masters because there is something about them that is ascetic: they've given up so many desires to be a craftsman, and put in thousands of hours to "see" into their work and to reveal it. And there's a gift that these patterns give to these practices and that's what I'd like to share.

Sacred Geometry is for me really a way of accessing divine knowledge in a





Alhambra Palace, Granada, Andalusia, Spain

***It's clear what Beauty is, the archetype that is absolute, and that we can all agree wholeheartedly on what is beautiful.***

scientific & rational way, a way to understand nature, and this divine code, to actually experience it and feel it.

Whether I'm working in Morocco or Malaysia, discussing patterns on a carpet, I find they are all interlinked, the craftsmen have the same approach and it's clear what Beauty is, the archetype that is absolute, and that we can all agree wholeheartedly on what is beautiful. And then there are patterns within patterns. I can remember as a teenager going to Alhambra Palace, and other places and not really understanding what I was seeing, but being affected by it, because you are elevated by these patterns: they have a lot of intuitive work behind them that really hit a spot within your heart."

***Reflection:*** What emerges so strikingly from Adam's words is that as human beings we clearly resonate with the archetype of Beauty. Craftsmen intuitively use these patterns. Art & Architecture that still move us today have used these patterns. The fact that they occur so universally across all geographies of space & time is perhaps evidence that in spite of our diversity there is something that deeply connects us all: a universal resonance with the archetype of Beauty.





**Not only does the Golden Ratio and the Fibonacci Spiral that is created from it appear abundantly in nature – in flowers, seed-pods, pinecones, sea shells, hurricanes and galaxies but the human body is also completely full of the Golden Proportion.**

Adam then spoke to us about the Golden Ratio that was used most famously perhaps by Leonardo da Vinci, and is embedded in much of the art and architecture surrounding the Renaissance. Many of these ideas were first offered by Pythagoras and then by Plato who noted that if a line was divided into 2 unequal segments such that the smaller segment was related to the larger in the same proportion that the larger was related to the whole, this would result in a specifically pleasing relationship that came to be known as the Golden Ratio.

**Adam:** "Relatedness or relationship is the key to understanding what Golden Mean and Golden Meaning is all about. To strike a Golden Mean relationship is obviously to get much closer to the truth, which in turn can indicate the unity of the whole universe." That's a quote from my teacher Keith Critchlow. And isn't this what our path is?

Not only does the Golden Ratio and the Fibonacci Spiral that is created from it appear abundantly in nature – in flowers, seed-pods, pinecones, sea shells, hurricanes and galaxies but the human body is also completely full of the Golden Proportion: The elements of your fingers, the finger to your hand, your hand to your elbow, your elbow to your shoulder, the distance of your eyes,... it's incredible, it's like magic. These are the ways we can marvel at the human body because it's not just coincidence."

**Reflection:** *What surfaces from this is the realization that patterns are really the building blocks of the universe, and everything in it. This idea emphasizes that we are all part of one whole interlinked web of life. We are all built from the same pattern, proportion, and geometry. We are of nature, and nature is part of us.*





Adam next tackled three-dimensional geometry and Platonic Solids which are convex solids whose faces are identical, with each side composed of a regular polygon. Though these shapes have been used a thousand years before Plato, they are assigned to him as he was the first to document them as symbols related to the elements: Earth, Fire, Water, Air and the universe. Interestingly, cultures across the world from Japan, Aboriginal Australians, and Native Americans all use these same symbols to signify the same thing.

A lively question-answer session followed.

**Question: Do you have a theory as to why some ideas of beauty and shape are universal across cultures and times horizons?**

**Adam:** I think it flows very much from how all people connect to universal beauty. It's the archetypal Beauty that we are returning to. Ancient Traditions didn't have as much confusion as we have now. Today I see social media, movies, entertainment as modern Alchemy. Your attention is being pulled away from the archetypes. It is quite dangerous. If you don't have a practice, you can be washed away in all of this for the rest of your life. But when you lived in the mountains, forests and deserts, connected to nature, that's when the archetypes get mirrored into your lives, all across the world.

**Question: Can you share with us how this understanding of sacred geometry as part of all life may have caused a shift in your perspective of the world?**

**Adam:** I feel at peace when I see these signs all around, these proofs that there is universal order. I feel it deep within me when I'm working, not highs & lows but an equilibrium. When I'm drawing or carving I feel like I'm in a safe place. I would seek out any opportunity to do incredibly arduous carving projects because I felt as if my atoms connect to that process.

Take my earlier example of the Fibonacci Spiral on pine cones: At the beginning it's a little chaotic, but as the spiral grows outwards it gets tighter and closer to the Fibonacci sequence. It's like that in nature, the seeds are born into this world and as they grow towards the light they get more divine, closer to perfection.

**Question: You have spoken in other talks of how the Arts and the Sacred Geometry are a means to educate ourselves. Can you elaborate on that for us?**

**Adam:** It's so completely simple. If you really stop and look at nature, at Sacred Geometry it has all the wisdom you need. And this is the lesson for me to



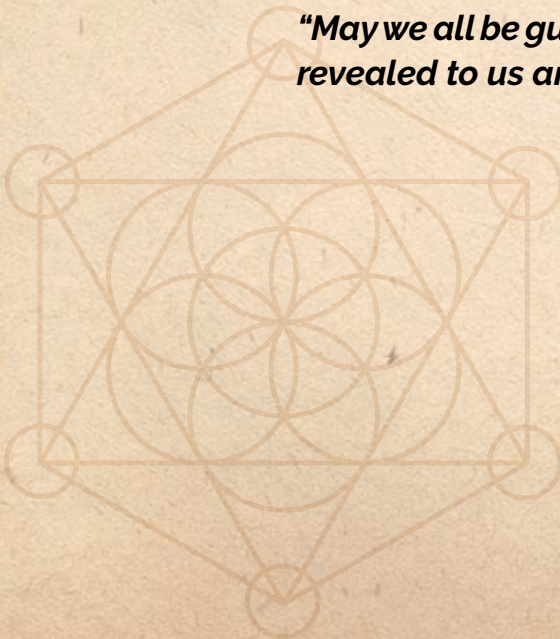


learn: When you are rigid, when you don't have balance and equilibrium, you're constantly feeling like you're not in control, and things are not working out because it's your fault, or it's just unfair. And that is not a nice space to be in. But when you understand the universal order, even when you're in a really tough moment, well there is a purpose and when you have that trust, you are in a place of relaxation.

**Reflection:** *The idea that the entire universe follows precise mathematical laws suggests a divine order. The same sacred geometry that is present at the cellular level in the shape of our DNA is present in the movement of the stars and planets: Nature is telling us, As Above, So Below: that nothing is in isolation, everything is intimately connected. In Art and Architecture, sacred geometry of pattern and proportion is a language that communicates aesthetic, philosophical and mathematical archetypes across differing cultures and traditions. These patterns within patterns are symbolic of the connection of the part to the whole and serves as a visible reminder to us of the Principles of Correlation and Unity.*

Adam began his talk to us with this invocation, but the words of Keith Critchlow referring to 3 great archetypes are an equally fitting end to the remarkable evening of insights and wisdom he shared with us:

***"May we all be guided by Truth, May we have Beauty revealed to us and May it result in the Good." △△△***







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# MY ORIGINAL FACE BEFORE MY PARENTS WERE BORN: THE TRYST WITH KOANS

By Sukesh Motwani



**A Zen master asks his student, "Without thinking good or evil, in this very moment, What is your original Face? .... Show me your Original Face, the face you had before your parents were born."**

**"Quickly, quickly, without thinking right and wrong..."**

**(Before the engines of thought and feeling start revving, before you're making judgements or starting to act out of some motivation like trying to win or to please)**

**"...before your parents were born" (before the whole mad story of You heaves into the picture, complete with family legacies handed down through the generations) ...what is your original face?" (Before all that, who are you truly?)**



So this pithy question is like asking a sunflower what it was before it was a sunflower, or the wind before it was wind? A true Zen master never asks to see something that isn't already there. We often think of gates as appearing before us, inviting us to enter, but this koan is like a gate appearing behind you, inviting you to step back into *abiding nowhere*---that is, to return to the vastness where you're a true person of no rank or status, your face aglow with the original rising sun. *What is it like to respond from that place? What is it like to step back through the gate into the koan, into the moment, and let your abiding-nowhere heart-mind appear? To gaze with your original face on the original faces all around you?*

Koans can be termed as paradoxical anecdotes or riddles without a solution, used in Zen Buddhism to demonstrate the inadequacy of logical reasoning and 'provoke' enlightenment. Zen Buddhists use koans during meditation to help them unravel greater truths about the world and about themselves. Zen masters have been testing their students with these stories, questions, or phrases for centuries.

The word *koan* or *gongan* in the original Chinese, means a public case or precedent. We draw from the precedent, as per the understanding of the masters. Teachers may add their understanding when working on koans with students, but those early guideposts are the basic frame of reference. Initially, koans were simply stories about things that had happened—a record of a conversation, usually between teacher and student, though sometimes between two students or other people. Over time, additional elements such as poetry and references to popular culture were folded into the developing body of koan texts.



Some mind-bending koans that I recommend readers to consider right at the beginning:

**With empty hands I pick up the hoe.  
(Mahasattva Fu<sup>1</sup>)**

To me, this koan suggests that an empty mind becomes the hoe for removing the impurities of our personality, the weeds of greed, anger and ignorance.

**Someone ask Yunmen,  
"What is reaching the light?"  
Yunmen replied,  
"Forget the Light. First give me the reaching."  
(Yunmen Wenyan<sup>2</sup>)**

Often, after an exhausting intellectual struggle with a koan, the zen student realizes that the koan is actually meant to be understood by a deeper intuition. It serves as a surgical tool used to cut into and then break through the mind of the practitioner... Koans aren't just puzzles that your mind figures out suddenly and proclaims, "Ah! The answer is 4!" They wait for you to open enough to allow the space necessary for them to enter into your depths—the inner regions beyond knowing. For all aspiring philosophers too, koans befuddle us enough to allow a space almost devoid of the machinations of the thinking mind, to emerge...and we may get a true glimpse of our higher selves or the heart-mind. Thereby helping us in pursuit of the true nature of our identity and reality.

Many koans can be traced back to the collections of sayings amassed by Chinese priests in the 12th and 13th centuries. Each Koan School has its own, unique Miscellaneous collection, which is studied along with the classic texts like the *Gateless Gateway* and the *Blue Cliff Record*. The use of the koan as a formal teaching tool entered



the West through the efforts of pioneering teachers such as Soyen Shaku, and his student Nyogen Senzaki who compiled his *101 Zen Stories* in 1919 and Sokei-an Shigetsu Sasaki, a Zen master in the 1930s.

The epigraph below, called *Honoring* is from a longer Chinese poem made of koans about the journey home and then home itself. You enter koans through the door of your own life, right into the world around you.

**For whom do you bathe and make  
yourself beautiful?  
The voice of the cuckoo is calling you home.  
Hundreds of flowers fall, but her cry never ends  
Still clear even in the wildest mountains.  
(Dongshan<sup>3</sup>)**



Our yearning needs to be firstly honoured, the effort to build true conviction that there is something that will receive you if you make yourself ready. Bathed, washed free of entanglements and impurities, and then aspiring to the deepest kind of beauty. Flowers fall, which is a way the ancients had of saying that time passes, and the call is always present, even in the wildernesses of your life, the most confused and lost times. In Chinese legend, the cuckoo will call until her throat bleeds and turns the azaleas red. The way to honour the mystery of the world's perseverance on our behalf is by hearing it and responding<sup>4</sup>. And the meaning of *Home* can only be grasped by being able to see deeply the context of eternity in each moment of transience.

*The moon shines on the river,  
Wind stirs in the pines—  
Whose gift is this long, beautiful evening?  
(Yongjia Xuanjue<sup>5</sup>)*

*Home* is always just closer and waiting to be noticed even if it is not evident. As the Zen teacher Joan Sutherland aptly puts it 'That is what our call and response with world is, like fellow travellers in the mist, listening for each other, carrying the lanterns of *home* inside us'. She narrates this touching tale in her book *Through Forests of Every Colour* – "A traditional Japanese countrywoman named Nanjo Sawako began sewing a wedding kimono for her daughter Naoko when she was still a little girl, as was the custom. But Nanjo Naoko didn't grow up to get married and settle down in their small village; she became an international photojournalist. She died covering the Afghan war of the 1980s. Her mother, who said she had hoped for a normal, common life for her daughter, who had never left her village before, heard a call and responded adding a moment of extraordinary grace to the story

of the world. She made the dangerous journey to the front lines in Afghanistan, carrying the wedding kimono. She found her daughter's grave, marked with a simple wooden stake, and wrapped the remains in the kimono. A mother blesses her daughter's life, even if it isn't the life she would have chosen for her, isn't even a life she entirely understands. But it was her daughter's, and she gives it her blessing. She doesn't turn her love away from what is painful. Isn't this the ceremony that reveals the home in any moment? Even if this is not always the life I would have chosen for myself, it is mine, and I bless it. I bless this life that has been given into my care. It is **home**."







Despite the legacy of centuries, koans have always been with us, *and always are*. They arise naturally in life situations and out of the dilemmas we face. At times of crisis, as when we lose someone we love through death or separation, we can find that we are facing ultimate questions such as *What is the purpose of life?* In the instance of the death of a loved one, we may find ourselves asking, *Where has the one I love gone?* At such times, we may somehow find the resilience to stay with a fundamental question until it resolves.

Koans can connect us with this larger life we lose sight of amidst the daily concerns of living in our consumerist society, and make us sensitive to the joys and agonies of this life... bringing us closer to the primordial mystery beneath the veil of daily life. But the purpose

of realizing this, as the Chinese teacher Deshan said, is to break through to grasp an ordinary person's life. Shibayama Zenkei, a twentieth-century Rinzai teacher, said that etymologically kōan means the place where the truth is.

Koans invite us to take them into our lives so that we can experience the same state of consciousness as the characters in the story. Joan Sutherland cites this poem by Li Qingzhao, who was writing at the time the great old Chinese koan collections were being made. She evokes the encounter with koan, or the truth of our lives.

*Often I recall that day,  
the river pavilion  
in the setting sun, and  
we too drunk to know  
the way home, As  
our high spirits  
fled, we started  
to return late  
in our boat,  
but were confused,  
entered,  
deeply,  
a place where  
the flowering lotus  
was in full bloom.  
And struggling to go through,  
struggling  
to go through,  
we startled  
a whole sandbank of herons  
into flight.*

There are those golden moments of the evening by the river, our high spirits wear out, and on top of that we've lost the way back and now just struggling to get through. We don't notice the lotus in full bloom all around us. But suddenly *something* happens, there's



a great whoosh of herons flying and this blur of movement, and the unpleasant story of the waning day, the struggle to get home—just hides itself and the whole universe that you experience in this moment is the *heron*. The disconcerting elements of our struggle now to figure the way back, will arise again – but our thinking minds organically blanked out in this moment of eternity, and have been changed by our experience of the herons, the messengers of eternity, who have reminded us that we too, golden moments and disillusioning ones, are eternity itself. So koans help us enter state of consciousness within the bounds of our ordinary lives, but in an instant dissolving those bounds.

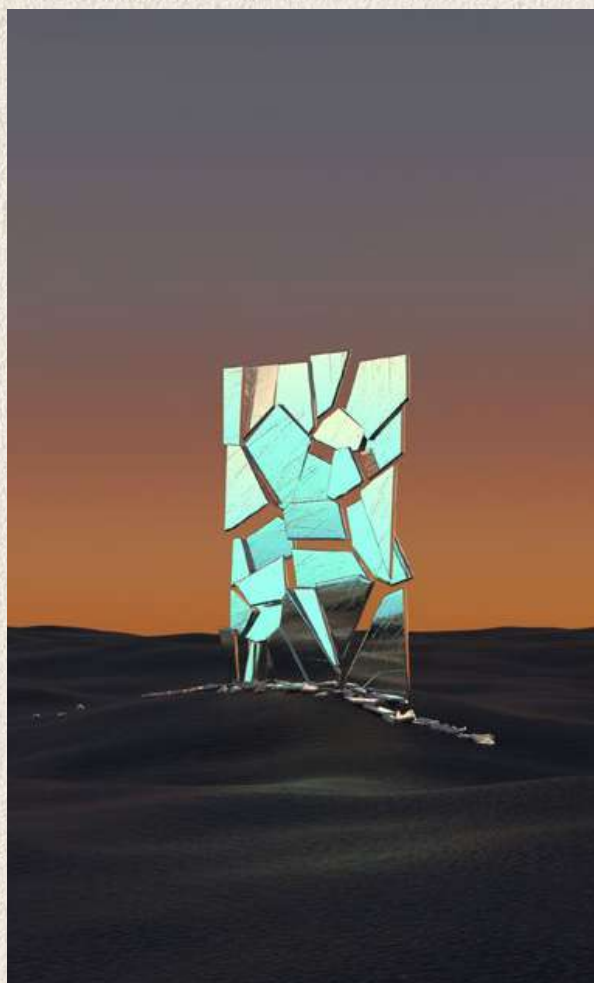
Judy Roitman<sup>6</sup> adds, “Zen Master Su Bong says that for working with koans, you have to be a great actor. We don’t have to pretend but that we completely **become** the koan. So if someone is hanging from a tree branch by her teeth, it’s you hanging from that branch, and you are hanging there completely, becoming that situation and fully witnessing it”. She also adds that when people give wrong answers to koans, the karma they carry, becomes visible. Our incorrect answers shows how our mind creates these feelings; we get to see our own delusions in a certain way.

*A monk asked Kegan, “How does an enlightened one return to the ordinary world?”  
Kegan replied, “A broken mirror never reflects again; fallen flowers never go back to the old branches.”*

The reply to this well-known koan here would probably be – once a wise person is awakened to the nature of reality, that *identification* can never go away, and they can return to the ordinary state, but only to do and help others. And we can assume that the meaning of the “broken mirror” has something to do with

unravelling truly the fact that the personality or the surface mind/body have never been truly one’s real nature. Hence showing that enlightenment is something you can’t unlearn, similar to how you can’t repair a broken mirror. One doesn’t need to identify as that body or this body and get so completely entangled with a name/status, a temporary role.

*‘Wash your bowls’. (From the Gateless Gate)  
Once a monk made a request of Joshu.  
“I have just entered the monastery,” he said.  
“Please give me instructions, Master.”  
Joshu said, “Have you had your breakfast?”  
“Yes, I have,” replied the monk.  
“Then,” said Joshu, “wash your bowls.”  
The monk had an insight.*





Commentary<sup>7</sup>: I am the student in the midst of my life, waiting for life to happen. I am the teacher pointing to this latte on my desk. I am the bowl that needs washing and the breakfast already eaten. How do we enter our life fully? It is right here. How do we want to live? Can we allow all the joys and sorrows to enliven us? Or do we just go along with all our patterns and habits? People who are dying always remind me: 'I can't believe I wasn't here for most of my life.' That's one of the most common regrets. Many people have not inhabited their life because they're just waiting for other moments. How can we give ourselves fully to our lives, moment to moment? Don't wait. Life is always right here.

Resolving a koan means identifying the doubt or question or wondering it raises in you,

and then living that question until the insight contained within it comes clear. Having a question, not knowing something, is a good thing, not to be rushed. In its resolution, something is put to rest, and something is revealed. This can come in a sudden flash, whole and complete, or it can come gradually like the dawn. In the end, possibly you and the koan have come to an understanding.

Aspiring philosophers shall realise that their efforts at seeking and elevation of their own consciousness, will lead them organically to become actively compassionate and help improve the lives of one and all in their spheres of life. The final koan - Bodhisattva's Koan (Blue Cliff Record, Case 89) is to help us understand this, as it looks at the archetype of compassion, the symbol of Guanyin and its thousand arms.



**Yunyan asked Daowu, "How does the Bodhisattva Guanyin use those many hands and eyes?"**

**Daowu answered, "It is like someone in the middle of the night reaching behind her head for the pillow."**

**Yunyan said, "I understand." Daowu asked, "How do you understand it?" Yunyan said, "All over the body are hands and eyes." Daowu said, "That is very well expressed, but it is only eight-tenths of the answer." Yunyan said, "How would you say it, Elder Brother?" Daowu said, "Throughout the body are hands and eyes."**

A philosopher ought to have relentless self-awareness, a relentless awareness of how their body and mind acts, so that he/she may realise more of their true identity beyond it, and let the ideas of body and mind fall away. So the more one strives in this inner work, the closer we shall be led to truly embodying the one who *experiences* no separation from the other, and just walk



on the path of being present as an active force for all. Yunyan's '*eighty percent*' reply is that this realization is like having eyes and hands all over our bodies. True, true, says his brother. But one hundred percent is that those eyes and hands are our body. There is no separation, between the universal self and the personal self, in each particular instance, in each particular person... Hence the koan simply expects to see the simplicity of this supreme compassion being depicted as '*someone turning in her sleep and reaching a hand behind her head to adjust her pillow.*'

The Zen master Bernie Glassman tells us "I define enlightenment as the depth to which one sees the oneness of life, the interconnectedness of life .... and the degree of your enlightenment can be measured by your actions."

Our sincere efforts at understanding and weeding out negative tendencies and vices of our personalities, all our inner work and reflection, is not separate from the deep will and courage to be of help to one and all for the rest of our lives, through the pandemic, the climate crisis and the social upheavals of

the Kaliyuga. In the midst of heartbreak and wonder, we need to learn how to summon our will and align with life each day, and with grace, strive for a new and better world by embodying the koan of Bodhisattvas, and say clearly, 'We are all in'. △△△

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Joan Sutherland is a teacher in the koan tradition, co-founder of the Pacific Zen School and founder of the Open Source, a network of communities. Many explanations used in this article are taken from her fabulous book.

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# NEWS SPOTLIGHT

► Philosophy

► Culture

► Volunteering

**NEW ACROPOLIS INDIA TURNED SWEET SIXTEEN** on Nov. 2<sup>nd</sup> and members from Mumbai and Pune came together to celebrate 16 years of promoting and putting into practice the teachings of ancient wisdom traditions from around the world. A pot-luck dinner shared by the whole fraternity, and presentations of stories, songs and poems provided camaraderie and inspiration in equal measure.

## PHILOSOPHY

**Philosophy seeks not knowledge but transformative understanding and wisdom.**



WORLD PHILOSOPHY DAY is a UNESCO initiative to affirm the importance of philosophy as a guiding force in the transformation of societies and individuals. As part of a global celebration of World Philosophy Day by New Acropolis in over 60 countries, New Acropolis (India), in collaboration with the National Gallery of Modern Art (Ministry of Culture, Government of India), hosted a presentation on the Universal Language of Symbols. National Director New Acropolis (India), Yaron Barzilay and Philosopher – Photographer Pierre Poulain, Regional Coordinator of New Acropolis International Organization for Asia-Africa-Oceania, spoke to an audience of almost 200 about how symbols exist everywhere around us - in nature, in our ceremonies and celebrations, and in our myths and sacred texts. By learning to decode them we can add richness and meaning to our lives, for they are a language in which life communicates with us, and invites us to discover the path of consciousness.



In our Pune centre too, a panel discussion on this topic was followed by an interactive session with the audience, who shared some symbols that have helped them develop and hold on to key values in their daily lives..

Also, in Mumbai, an interactive talk on HOW TO FIND STABILITY in our rapidly changing world, investigated the idea of external stability, which is bound to be transient, versus internal stability.



A lively panel discussion on the search for purpose and meaning entitled FAQ'S OF LIFE, used Plato's Allegory of the Chariot to understand our role in the interconnected Web of Life.

In Pune, a lecture on how to make a decisive choice, when faced with conflict, likening this to ARJUN'S DILEMMA in the Bhagwat Gita resonated deeply with the audience, across all ages . Drawing on lessons from the mythologies of the East and West, an interactive talk examined how to develop the virtues of a hero in order to SLAY YOUR INNER DRAGONS.

## CULTURE

**The cultivation of all that is best in every human being**



New Acropolis Culture Circle held 2 delightful musical evenings, each of which explored a musical genre through the lens of philosophy. Sufi singer Radhika Naik accompanied by Neil Mukherjee on guitar, paid A TRIBUTE TO GANDHIJI, through some of his favourite songs and bhajans. And singer Pelva Naik presented A DHRUPAD CONCERT, shedding light on one of the oldest classical styles of Hindustani music, as a language that communicates our deepest truths, which is beyond words. Both artists held their audiences spell-bound.

## VOLUNTEERING

**The natural expression of Philosophy in action**

After a two year break, New Acropolis Mumbai once again hosted a fun filled PHILOFAIR from 11am to 8pm. Volunteers put up stalls of their clothing, jewellery and cosmetics, while others presented workshops on art, saree draping, and leather craft. Home chefs served delicious refreshments from food stalls, and a live singing session from our youngest members kept spirits high all evening.





# GIORDANO BRUNO: SOME LIFE LESSONS

By Ambuj Dixit







Image by Berthold Werner / Wikimedia Commons / CC-BY-SA-2.5

***"And how many years can some people exist  
Before they're allowed to be free?"***

***Yes, and how many times can a man turn  
his head***

***And pretend that he just doesn't see?***

***How many times must a man look up  
Before he can see the sky?"***

These lines from Bob Dylan's song – Blowing in the Wind – flashed in my head as I put down another book written on Giordano Bruno, arguably one of the greatest philosophers from the 16th Century. The lines of the song and Giordano Bruno's quest seem to echo each other – to urge humanity to look beyond the dark sheaths of ignorance, the petty disputes, divisions and one-upmanship, and to explore the true identity of what it means to be human, which is much more than the mode of survival that has become the focus of our 'living', today.

Between the Middle Ages in Europe when it

was engulfed in darkness, and today where we admire the marvels of human creation, connectedness, technological advancement, and medical progress, have we really become smarter, happier, more loving and caring? Why does it feel that the last few hundred years of progress have largely been about attempts to master the everchanging outside, without ever addressing the real core of the problem? Have we even spent enough time to understand what the core is? Have we made progress towards finding out what our life is about and who we really are?

Allow me to give you a bit of background on Giordano Bruno, that could lend a fresh perspective to this investigation.

Giordano Bruno was an Italian philosopher, astronomer, and mathematician whose theories presented a vision of the world which emphasized the infinite. He was a prominent figure during the Renaissance, when Europe was witnessing the resuscitation of the idea of unity – the link between the one and the many.

Image by Federico Beccari / Unsplash / CC0

Image by Andrey Konstantinov / Unsplash / CC0





***Some of the fundamental ideas on which his teachings were based included heliocentrism, the notion that sun is the centre of our solar system; an infinite cosmos, consisting of many such solar systems; everything that exists is made up of identical particles – ‘seeds’, in his terminology, and God resides in all these seeds, and that this unifies the world.***

Born in 1548 in Naples, Italy, he lived a life of wonder, investigation and reflection about the universe and man's connection to, and role within it. At seventeen, he entered the Dominican monastery of San Domenico Maggiore, in Naples. He became a priest at the age of twenty-four and received the equivalent of a doctorate in theology three years later. He was apparently a bright student and also, now and then, an exasperated one, who did not agree with some of the principles of the teachings he received – for example, that of geocentricity that postulates earth as the centre of the universe. Around the age of twenty-seven, Bruno heard that he was being investigated by the Inquisition for heresy (1).

He left for Switzerland immediately and stayed on the run escaping the watchful eyes of the Church for the next fifteen years. He travelled extensively — Geneva, Toulouse, Lyon, Paris, London, Oxford, Wittenberg, Prague, Helmstedt, Frankfurt, Zurich, Padua, Venice— never staying more than two or three years in any city. During his lifetime, he produced some thirty works, including treatises, pamphlets, dialogues, poems, and even a play (1).

Some of the fundamental ideas on which his teachings were based included heliocentrism, the notion that sun is the centre of our solar system; an infinite cosmos, consisting of many such solar systems; everything that exists is made up of identical particles – ‘seeds’, in his terminology, and God resides in all these seeds, and that this unifies the world (1). Needless to say, all these ideas were in direct opposition with those of the Church, at that time.

In 1592, during a secret visit to Venice, Italy, he was betrayed by one of his students and

was thus captured by the Inquisition. Tried for heresy by the Church, he was asked to recant if he wanted to save his life, but he adamantly refused to do so. He was declared an 'impenitent, pertinacious, and obstinate heretic,' and condemned to die. In 1600, he was burnt at the stake.

The idea of sharing the story of Giordano Bruno is not to learn the various theories he proposed, but to investigate if through his heroic life, we can find some answers to what is perhaps the most essential question that humanity has been facing - Who am I?

Humanity seems to be lost in its attachment with the everchanging form and the multiplicity that is prevalent all around us. The lack of discernment between the invisible, essential and eternal, from the illusory, material and temporary, results in an inordinate identification with the mortal body - leading to insecurity and frustration with regard to one's own limitedness. With the absence of a relevant perspective on what role the material

and the visible plays in the realm of human purpose, the various forms that nature has served us with, seems to be confusing and overwhelming. Is there a way to understand the essence and connect with it again?

Annie Besant, in her book on Giordano Bruno, states, "Form is the manifestation of the unity". She adds, "Unity manifests itself in three hypostases. The 1st is Thought: The act of divine thought, according to Giordano Bruno, is the substance of things, the root of all particular beings....

The 2nd and 3rd hypostases of Universal Being are Spirit and Matter, where Spirit is the formative element, and the matter is the receptive element that takes shape as per the spirit." (2)

If we extend this insight to the mortal aspect of the human being that we identify with - the body - we will see that Bruno is guiding us to assign the body its proper place. "The body is in the soul, the soul is in the thought and the







Thought is either divine or is in the divine." (2)

"The soul of man is the only God there is. This principle in man moves and governs the body, is superior to the body, and cannot be constrained by it. It is Spirit, the real self, in which, from which and through which are formed the different bodies, which have to pass through different kinds of existences, names and destinies." (1)

If all the plurality and multiplicity we see around us are different kinds of existences, names and destinies of the same divine that is in all of us, maybe finally, we can better understand Bob Dylan's question - How many years can some people exist, before they're allowed to be free? Maybe, he is referring to the freedom from our illusions, to be able to see the underlying connection in everything we have around us; freedom to see the forest, instead of the hundreds of trees it is made of. Both Dylan and Bruno seem to be suggesting that we have caged ourselves in the illusion of separation, emerging out of attachment to the external.

This might look like advice beyond our capabilities, but if we look past our doubts, life will provide experiences that will strengthen

## ***Life presents us with opportunities to grow every day.***

this conviction that there is more to ourselves, and to life, beyond what we see. With this recognition, we may also come to realize the control we actually have - not over circumstances and other people, but definitely over our own approach, and our responses.

We can start with the small acts - like when angry and vulnerable to our impulsive self, try to be objective and remember that I am not my impulse. If I love food, then instead of giving in to the impulsive tendencies of the tongue, know that it is the body that is craving for food and its interest would be better served not with surfeit but with measured quantities. Rather than becoming irritated in a traffic jam, use it as an opportunity for productive 'me time'.

Life presents us with opportunities to grow every day, to learn the difference between the temporary and the eternal and to continue to improve our ability to make wiser choices, by choosing spirit over matter.

And what if we took some steps, but failed? What is the worst that may happen? We might

fall back into our ingrained habits, impulses, and tendencies. But what if we experience something different? What if one small step leads to another small step, and then another, and one day a change in perspective occurs that opens a whole new world altogether?

Bruno, like all many philosophers, had great faith in human potential and man's ability to aspire to goodness. He writes, "Enough that all should run; enough that each should do that which is possible for him; since the heroic mind is content rather to fall or to fail worthily and in a high cause wherein the dignity of his spirit is shown forth, than to achieve perfection in things less noble or even base."

He adds, "profound magic is to know how to unite contraries, having found the point of union". When we learn to go beyond the

multiplicity, we will realize that what unites us is actually far more important than what divides us. We learn how to simplify life because we understand that the laws of the Universe that govern all life forms, govern us too. We let go of constant overthinking by introducing ourselves to the innate intelligence that guides all living forms. We connect to the magic called life.

Perhaps Giordano Bruno's life can inspire us to explore the magic of uniting the contraries enabling us to clearly see the unifying sky, about which Bob Dylan so passionately sang to us all!

Happy adventure! 

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*"Enough that all should run; enough that each should do that which is possible for him; since the heroic mind is content rather to fall or to fail worthily and in a high cause wherein the dignity of his spirit is shown forth, than to achieve perfection in things less noble or even base."*

Giordano Bruno



# PUBLIC EVENTS NEW ACROPOLIS MUMBAI

**Sat  
7 Jan**

**Interactive  
Talk  
6 pm (2 hrs)**  
[Register Here](#)



## LESSONS FROM PLATO ON LIVING AUTHENTICALLY

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.

**Sat  
21 Jan**

**Interactive  
Talk  
6 pm (2 hrs)**  
[Register Here](#)



## DEVELOPING INNER STRENGTH: LESSONS FROM GREAT WARRIORS

Warrior traditions of the past, be it the serene 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 to explore how we can learn to face our daily challenges with the inner strength and stability of a warrior.

**Sat  
11 Feb**

**Interactive  
Talk  
6 pm (2 hrs)**  
[Register Here](#)



## PRINCIPLES OF LIFE THROUGH SACRED ARCHITECTURE

"Is there more to life than what meets the eye? Different traditions speak of eternal principles of life, which, if we are able to align to, can allow us to live with more harmony and meaning. Together we will explore the wisdom beyond the external grandeur of sacred architecture like the pyramids of Egypt, or ancient Indian temples, to discover timeless lessons for our lives today.

# PUBLIC EVENTS NEW ACROPOLIS MUMBAI

**Sat  
18 Feb**

**Interactive  
Talk  
6 pm (2 hrs)  
[Register Here](#)**



## **A STOIC GUIDE TO HAPPINESS**

### *A Glimpse into Living Philosophy*

The Stoic philosophers were known for their ability to remain serene and upright in the face of any circumstance. What practical lessons can we learn from the Stoics, to direct our own life with more meaning, contentment and courage today?

**We invite you for a glimpse of our Living Philosophy course!**

**Sat  
11 Mar**

**Interactive  
Talk  
6 pm (2 hrs)  
[Register Here](#)**



## **ART OF CONCENTRATION**

### *A Glimpse into Living Philosophy*

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! Through a talk and practical exercises, we will explore how developing the art of concentration can allow us to bring more depth, focus and stability to daily living.

**We invite you for a glimpse of our Living Philosophy course!**

**Sat  
25 Mar**

**Interactive  
Talk  
6 pm (2 hrs)  
[Register Here](#)**



## **DISCOVERING THE HERO WITHIN: LESSONS FROM MYTHOLOGY**

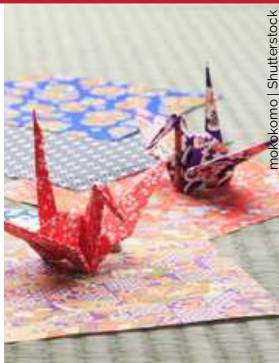
Mythology can be found at the heart of ancient civilisations across the world, be it the mighty Hercules from the Greek tradition or Gilgamesh of Mesopotamia. In fact, the concept of super heroes continues to pervade popular culture even today. What can we learn from the journey of these mythical figures as they conquer challenges and learn to express their true nature as heroes? Together we will explore how we can bring this spirit of adventure and victory into our daily lives.



What makes a hero? Maybe it is the need to stand for what is good for even if it means standing alone, or the daring to move forward towards solutions in spite of fears and doubts. We do need heroes in our world today! What if within us, there exists this potential? What if we could break open the doors of our limitations? We invite you to join us for this inner adventure. Let us learn from different traditions the path of becoming an inner warrior.

**Sat  
21st Jan**

**Talk &  
Workshop  
6:00 pm (2 hrs)  
[Register Here](#)**



### BEING IN THE PRESENT MOMENT: LESSONS FROM ORIGAMI

More than hand-eye coordination, the art of folding paper to make beautiful sculptures is about mental concentration. What can we learn from this Japanese concept, to overcome our scatteredness in our day-to-day lives? Join us for a hands-on experience of being present through Origami.

**Sun  
29th Jan**

**Interactive  
Talk  
6 pm (2 hrs)  
[Register Here](#)**



### THE JOY OF MAKING MISTAKES: THROUGH STORYTELLING

What are stories, but the narrative of lives? Of sometimes imperfect people who inspire us because we resonate with their struggles and their spirit in enduring them. We invite you to participate in an evening of story-telling, to explore how making mistakes can be the first step to victory.

**Sat  
11th Feb**

**Interactive  
Talk  
6 pm (2 hrs)  
[Register Here](#)**



### DARE TO BE AUTHENTIC: LESSONS FROM SOCRATES

#### *A Glimpse into Living Philosophy*

"Socrates, one of the greatest philosophers of our times, was as humble as he was brave. He dedicated his life to the enquiry and investigation towards Truth, even at the cost of his own life. Let us look at his extraordinary example, to bring a spark of courage and to search and stand for Truth in our own daily lives.

**We invite you for a glimpse of our Living Philosophy course!**

# PUBLIC EVENTS NEW ACROPOLIS PUNE

**Sat**  
**25th Feb**

**Interactive**  
**Talk**  
**6 pm (2 hrs)**  
**[Register Here](#)**



## **CREATING STRONGER RELATIONSHIPS: LESSONS FROM THE STOICS**

*A Glimpse into Living Philosophy*

**"Throw me to the wolf and I will return leading the pack" - Seneca**

How can we establish unity? What if there is a path to becoming centred internally so that we could positively impact every relationship that we touch and bring harmony. Join us as we explore how to build stronger relationships, the Stoic way.

**We invite you for a glimpse of our Living Philosophy course!**

**Sat**  
**11 Mar**

**Interactive**  
**Talk**  
**6 pm (2 hrs)**  
**[Register Here](#)**



## **THE 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.

**Sun**  
**26 Mar**

**Interactive**  
**Talk**  
**6 pm (2 hrs)**  
**[Register Here](#)**



## **PAVING THE PATH OF TRUTH: LESSONS FROM THE DHAMMAPADA**

It is said that the Buddha's journey took him from a princely life into a dedicated search for a solution to the challenges of all mankind. Let's explore how we could walk a few steps on the path he paved, to sow some seeds of wisdom in our lives. Join us to draw lessons from the Dhammapada, which could help us to see the process in a clearer light.

Events will be held in-person at our Pune Centre.



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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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