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# THE ACROPOLITAN

Life as a Work of Art

**FEATURE**

The Science of Tomorrow:  
An Alliance of Reason and  
Spirituality

Philosophy in Action:  
Victory of Light over  
Darkness

Celebrating Dhruvad:  
In concert with Pelva Naik

**JAN | FEB | MAR**  
**2024**





# FROM THE EDITORIAL DESK

Dear Reader,

Without a stable axis, it is easy to get lost in the maze of complexity; without a bridge, easy to get stuck in the realm of superficiality that we have in the world today. Philosophy offers a paradigm shift beyond just an alternative perspective, in a journey that leads us past the confines of dogma, whether scientific or religious, it helps to connect to the essence of things as they are meant to be.

Through the philosophical lens, science fundamentally is more than mere reason; it embodies a sincere pursuit for truth, an endeavour to understand the intricacies of life. Art whether manifested in music, painting or any other form, becomes a conduit for our inward journey. It can help unveil our layers and facilitate an exploration of our true identity, allowing us to imagine our potential and strive towards its realization.

To deal with the separation we see today, we need to glimpse the oneness of life. Philosophy is the way to discover the unbreakable connection between the individual and the collective whole. It provides us a compass on how we can lead a more harmonious life – more in tune with ourselves, with society, and consequently with life at large.

With the celebrations of World Philosophy Day this past November, and as we transition from winter towards spring, a timeless odyssey beckons us to Discover. Awaken, Transform.

Malini Nair  
Editor

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# WORLD PHILOSOPHY DAY: THE TRUTH ISN'T JUST OUT THERE; IT'S IN YOU

First Published in the ***Indian Express***

By Trishya Screwvala  
& Malini Nair



At a time when we are increasingly in search of the light, for the good... perhaps Philosophy can offer answers.

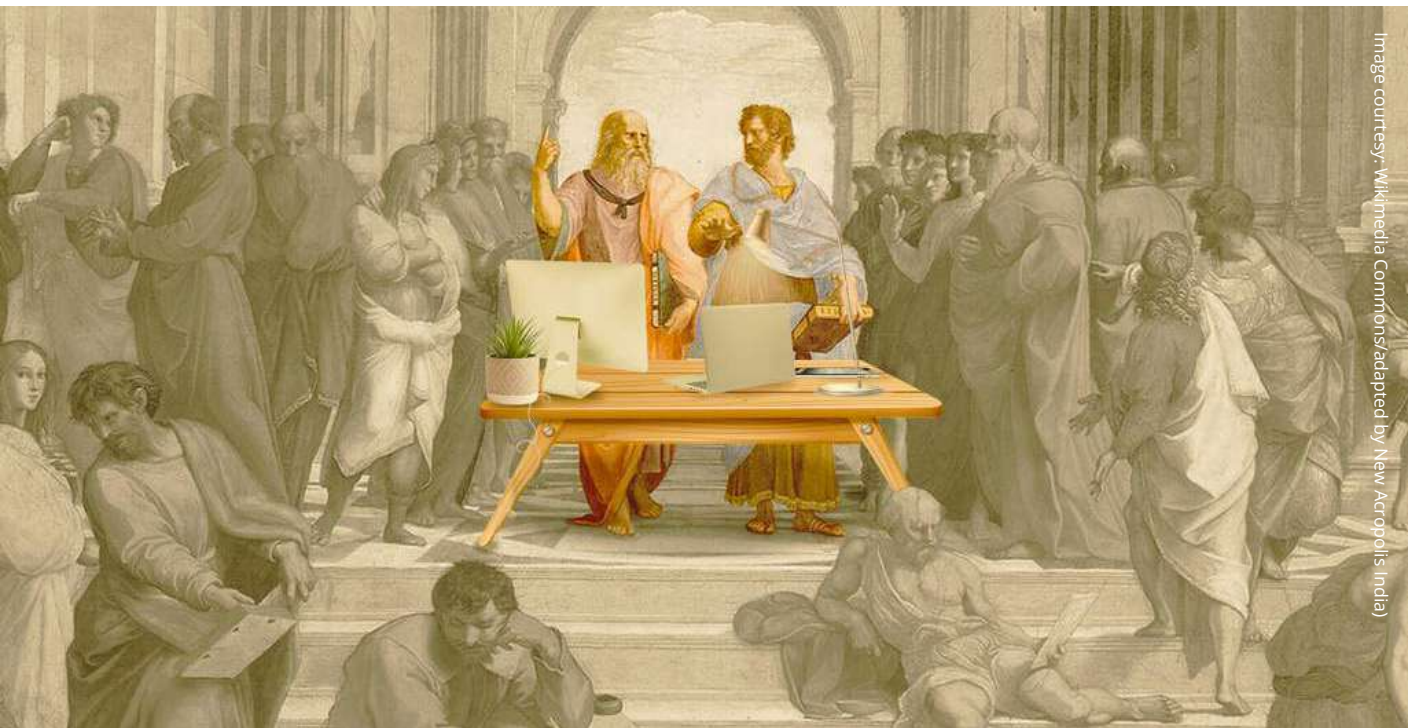
World Philosophy Day was initiated by UNESCO in 2002, as a means to revive the value and need for Philosophy in improving our world, by bettering ourselves. But can Philosophy really improve our world?

A famous anecdote about the origin of the term “philosophy” speaks of an admirer of the Greek philosopher and mathematician Pythagoras who once referred to him as “sophos” (wisdom). Pythagoras replied, “I am not sophos (wisdom); I am merely philo-sophos (lover of wisdom)!”. At its core, Philosophy embodies love — a force that unites, one that pulls us to the essence of things. It is a yearning towards what is true and just, an ongoing pursuit of wisdom,

a way of life. A philosopher, therefore, as a seeker of wisdom aspires not only to understand it better, but to apply it, to live it, to become it.

Far from being an academic exercise of accumulating information about philosophers, Philosophy was always meant to be a path of investigation, of discovering our true nature, while simultaneously discovering deeper truths about life: Who am I? Is there a purpose to life?

It aims to draw from our universal human heritage, to learn from the wisdom of sages of the past, to discover the values and ideals that ancient civilisations aspired to live by, strived to preserve and pass down — in order to apply this timeless wisdom in our daily lives today and contribute to a better future.



So, what wisdom can we glean from the philosophers of the past?

**Yesterday I was clever, so I wanted to change the world. Today I am wise, so I am changing myself. ~ Rumi**

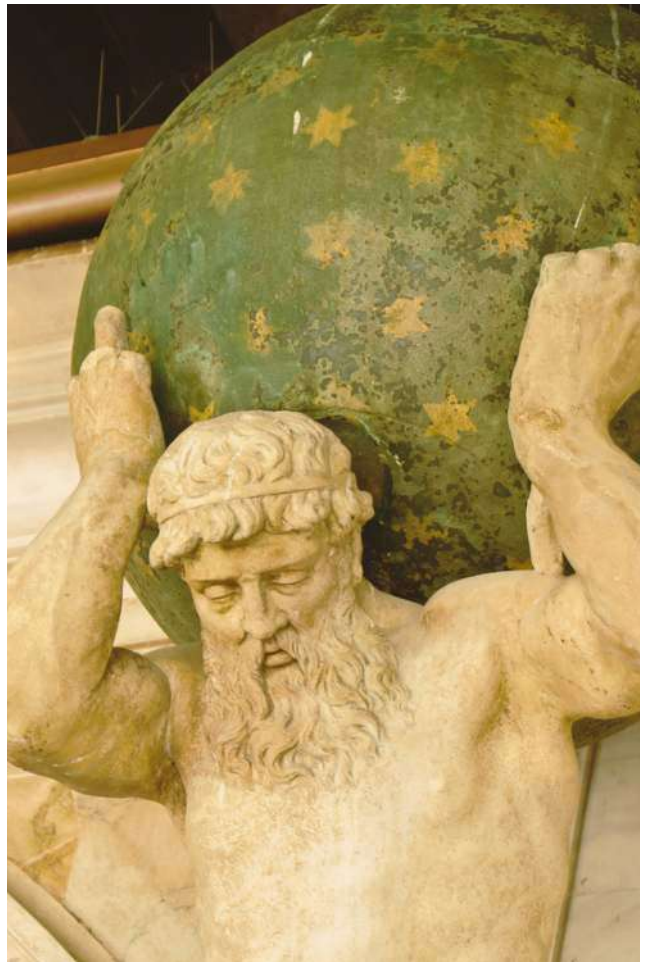
We need to look inward to bring about change before pointing fingers. With incredible advancements, we can communicate across the globe in seconds, even travel to space — yet we struggle to live in harmony with our neighbours, and we perhaps don't know how to live in harmony with our planet. Can we change the world around us, before adjusting our own attitudes, aspirations and what we value as human beings? Philosophy is the practice of always starting with ourselves - to address challenges and look internally for solutions. It is to bring harmony, tolerance, and understanding within us before we can expect others, nations, or our world to follow suit.

**To live a life of virtue, match up your thoughts, words and deeds. ~ Epictetus**

Philosophy is not mere contemplation, or good ideas and intentions. It necessitates action. We live in a world where information is at our fingertips, where we can access books and quotes by philosophers in seconds, yet this knowledge doesn't seem to make us wiser, or more content. Philosophy is an active practice - of investigating truth,

beauty, justice and goodness. It is to allow the works of those who dedicated their lives towards this quest, to become our own through our personal experiences.

To better ourselves, to become more consistent and able to follow through with what we understand is right in the smallest of choices — despite the circumstances, or discomfort — demands time and effort. Just like developing any skill, it requires dedication, practice, and persistence, to not only imagine a stronger, brighter and more dependable version of the self, but to actively construct ourselves in this light, and to see this as our contribution or offering.



**To put the world in order, we must first put the nation in order; to put the nation in order, we must put the family in order; to put the family in order, we must cultivate our personal life; and to cultivate our personal life, we must first set our hearts right.**

**~ Confucius**

Philosophy is to begin to discover the unbreakable connection between the individual and the whole. As we delve deeper into discovering who we truly are, it can provide a clearer direction on how we can live better, more in tune with ourselves, and consequently with life at large. In our times today, marked by increasing intolerance, ecological imbalances, and growing uncertainty, ancient wisdom — from Krishna's words to Arjuna at the brink of the battle of Kurukshetra, to Plato's allegory of the chariot of the horses — inspires us to revive our ethical axis as human beings.

Before reforming systems and policies, a return to our roots may be in order. Rediscovering and practicing human values — courage in the face of fear, tolerance in the face of ignorance, strength in the face of weakness, generosity in the face of selfishness... isn't this what our world needs, what those around us need, the strength and stability that we ourselves need? This is Philosophy in action — to strengthen the light within us, to bring out what makes us human — and this is an everyday practice that perhaps we need now more than ever.

With the spirit of Diwali, and the 17th anniversary of the New Acropolis School of Philosophy in India (North), through which we have been introduced to these treasures of our collective human wisdom, we wish us all to learn to discover and nurture the light that lies within us, and to allow it to shine and triumph over the darkness — both within ourselves and in our world. ☺☺☺



# Celebrating Dhrupad

## In concert with Pelva Naik

Compiled by Nupur Sampat

Pelva Naik has been trained in the Dhrupad style of vocal music under the Dagar School of Indian Classical Music. She is a disciple of legendary Dhrupad maestro Ustad Zia Fariduddin Dagar and is a teacher of Art, Music and Humanities. She has performed in festivals and concerts in India and abroad.

New Acropolis Culture Circle hosted a musical evening with Pelva Naik, where, accompanied by Shri Jayant Naidu on the tanpura, she enthralled the audience with a rendition of *Raag Puriya Dhanashree*. The audience soaked in the raag as she went from *vilambhit laya* (slow elaborate tempo) to *madhya laya* (middle tempo) to *dhrut laya* (fast tempo). The performance was followed by a discussion about her journey with music and her process of learning. The following is an extract of the same:





Pelva was exposed to classical music from early childhood, though not trained formally. On meeting Guru, Ustad Zia Fariduddin Dagar, she immediately knew she had found her teacher.

## ***Ultimately, it's Love and Love is Difficult.***

**~ Pelva Naik**

She feels that she didn't 'choose Dhrupad', rather she organically got drawn to an ecosystem where the ideal teacher and music were present. The meaning of *taleem*, for her, is a unique exchange, which is not just training but rather a process of giving and receiving. When this exchange is channelled effectively, something remarkable happens. It is, of course, a mix of technique and ways of *riyaz* or practice, but also other nuances like exchange of the emotive, and the building of a relationship between the teacher and disciple. It's almost like what happens with a child in a household and how the child grows up in an ecosystem. It's not just the classical Guru-shishya Parampara of the Indian musical tradition, it also depends on how you are in touch with life. So, *taleem* takes place, in that sense, with life, with how you perceive life. And here, she considers herself fortunate, that when she was younger, she had the masters and teachers around her to guide her perception of life.

Dhrupad is termed as one of the most 'difficult' forms of Indian Classical music. In her opinion, it is considered so because Dhrupad has more tools in the form of syllables that have evolved and been refined through so many generations, that it is an extremely fine-tuned device. In that sense it can be tedious to understand and demanding to achieve the technicalities. But ultimately, it's love, and love is difficult.





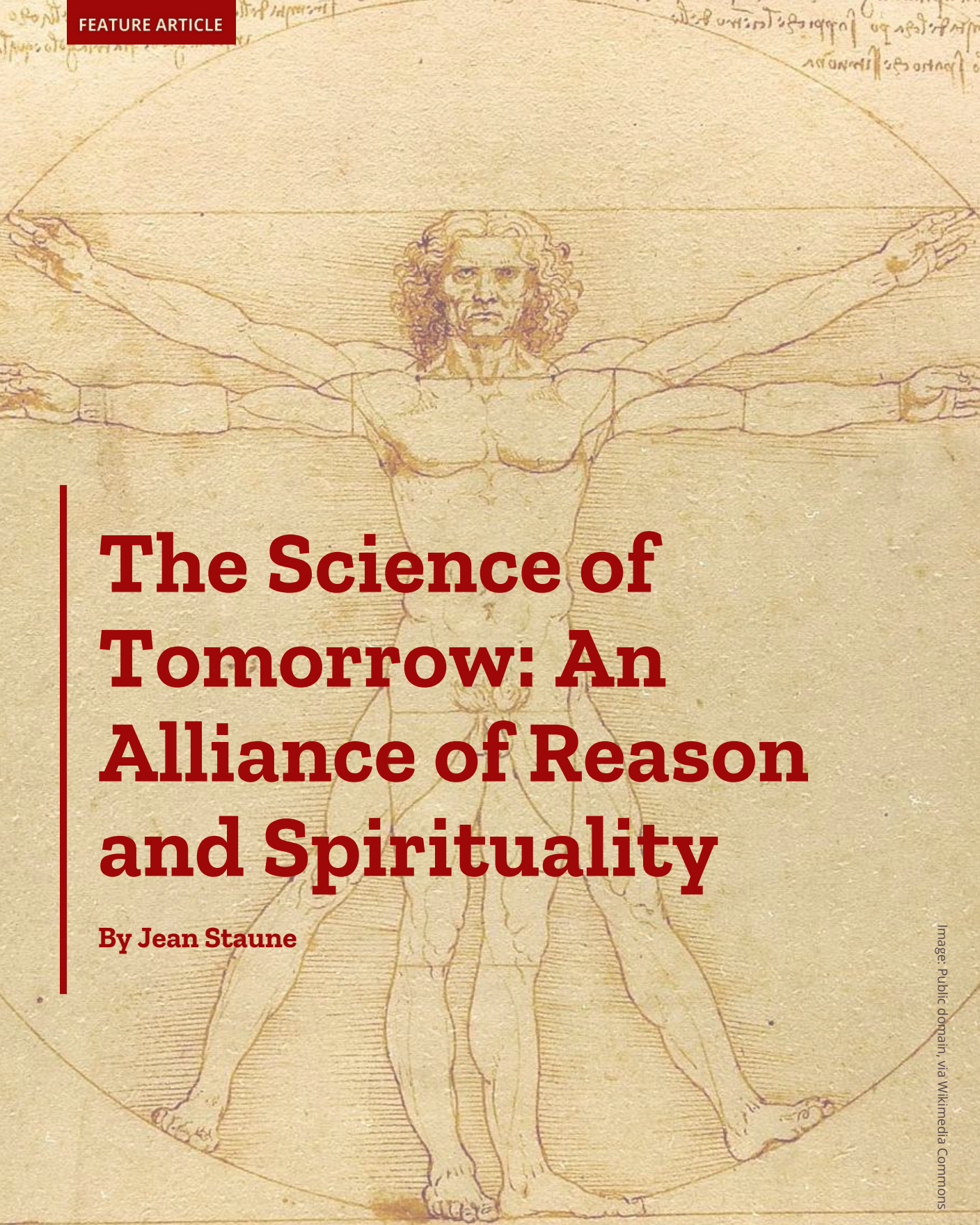
**She feels that she didn't 'choose Dhrupad', rather she organically got drawn to an ecosystem where the ideal teacher and music were present.**

Pelva gave an analogy for Dhrupad, saying it's like agriculture. You know you want to eat and so you have to farm. You have to dig the land and do the hard work and so at that time you don't complain about it being difficult. You just involve yourself and become one with it. She considers Dhrupad 'intricate' and not 'difficult' because when you love something, you drop the term 'difficult'.

Pelva spoke of the quest she is on - the quest to find purity, to understand what music is trying to reveal to us, its position in our life and in our happiness. When she practises an *alaap*, it is much beyond pleasure for her, it takes the form of a quest, navigating through the flux and contradictions of life. She strives to explore the mysteries of Dhrupad through her practice. This form of music, which is centuries old, has been accorded a very special place but this also makes it aloof. To her each *raag* is like a person with whom one defines a relationship. Through her *alaap*, she tries to unravel this relationship and its role in our emotions, suffering and happiness.

As human beings we have the remarkable vehicle of 'the voice'. Birds and animals have it too, but while birds can sing, they're not singing Dhrupad. We have evolved this language. And it is remarkable that it allows one to use it as a vehicle 'to unveil and be naked, to be true'. Pelva said, 'I think the act of singing itself is something where, it just makes you shed a lot of layers'... 'but whether you do that or not is up to you. And it shows when one sings.'

For Pelva, Dhrupad is a vehicle to go deeper into a complex, inward journey to discover and unveil the part of oneself that is honest, essential, and true. ☺☺



# The Science of Tomorrow: An Alliance of Reason and Spirituality

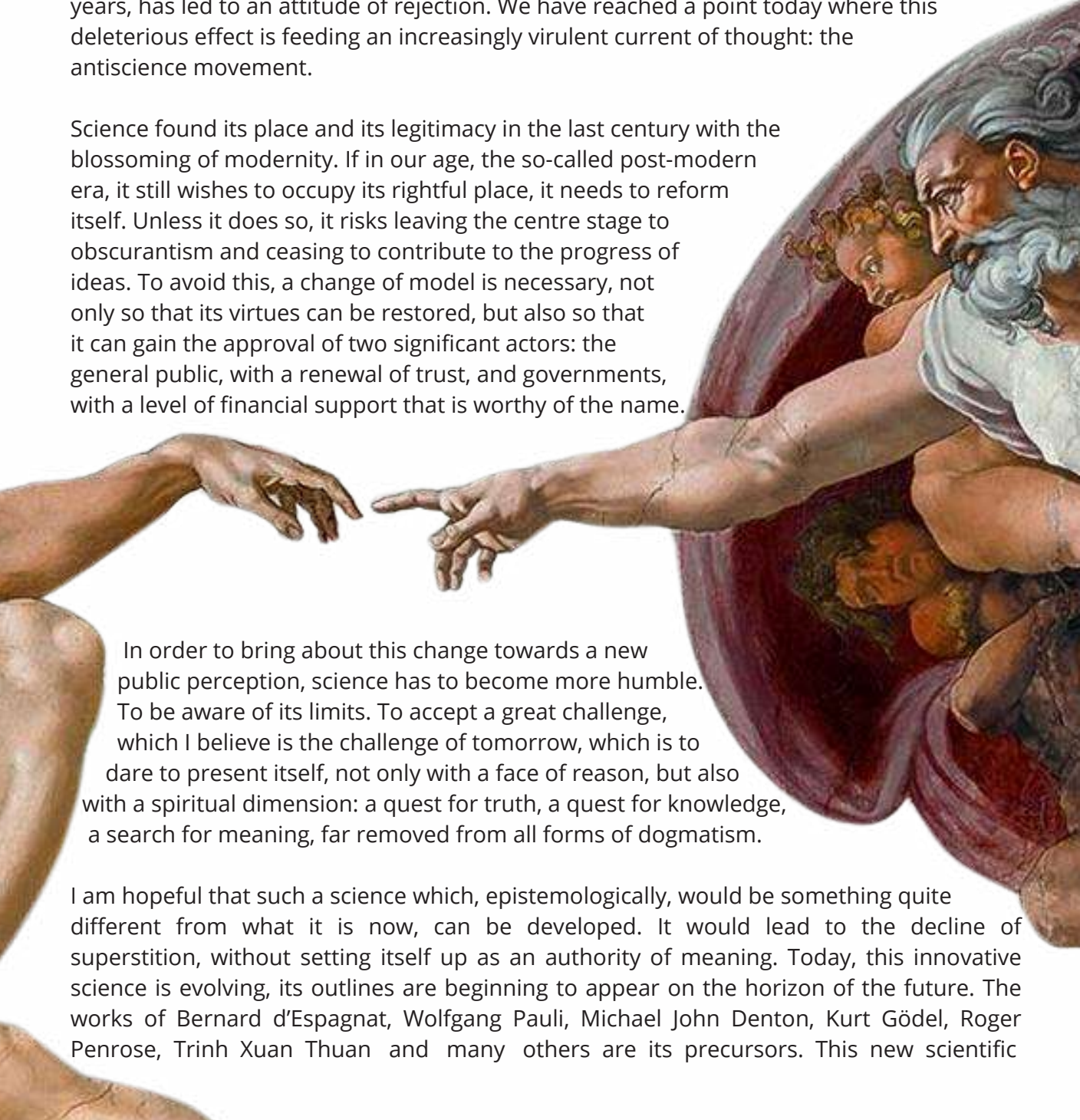
By Jean Staune

In view of what is happening today, it is possible that science may hold a less important place in the culture of tomorrow. Why? Because when science is called upon to express its view on certain subjects, it often adopts an excessively authoritarian tone. This uncompromising approach has discredited it in the eyes of public opinion and, over the years, has led to an attitude of rejection. We have reached a point today where this deleterious effect is feeding an increasingly virulent current of thought: the antiscience movement.

Science found its place and its legitimacy in the last century with the blossoming of modernity. If in our age, the so-called post-modern era, it still wishes to occupy its rightful place, it needs to reform itself. Unless it does so, it risks leaving the centre stage to obscurantism and ceasing to contribute to the progress of ideas. To avoid this, a change of model is necessary, not only so that its virtues can be restored, but also so that it can gain the approval of two significant actors: the general public, with a renewal of trust, and governments, with a level of financial support that is worthy of the name.

In order to bring about this change towards a new public perception, science has to become more humble. To be aware of its limits. To accept a great challenge, which I believe is the challenge of tomorrow, which is to dare to present itself, not only with a face of reason, but also with a spiritual dimension: a quest for truth, a quest for knowledge, a search for meaning, far removed from all forms of dogmatism.

I am hopeful that such a science which, epistemologically, would be something quite different from what it is now, can be developed. It would lead to the decline of superstition, without setting itself up as an authority of meaning. Today, this innovative science is evolving, its outlines are beginning to appear on the horizon of the future. The works of Bernard d'Espagnat, Wolfgang Pauli, Michael John Denton, Kurt Gödel, Roger Penrose, Trinh Xuan Thuan and many others are its precursors. This new scientific



**Science without  
religion is lame,  
religion without  
science is blind.**

—  
**Albert Einstein**



paradigm has the potential to be paradigm of tomorrow and to take a prominent place in the culture of the 21st century. It would liberate humanity from two forms of ignorance, which constitute a threat to the coming civilization: religious superstition and scientific dogma.

Albert Einstein, a visionary, a great scientist and a philosopher, who radically called into question the assumptions of an era, ventured to give this new paradigm a name: the cosmic religion [1].

"I maintain that the cosmic religious feeling is the strongest and noblest motive for scientific research." [2]

"Science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind." [3] 

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Jean Staune is a French philosopher of science, consultant, lecturer and essayist. His latest work is entitled "*La grande mutation, pourquoi votre futur sera extraordinaire*" ("The great mutation, why your future will be extraordinary"), Editions Diateno, 2021.

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*This article, which appeared in a special 2022 edition of the French magazine Acropolis, has been translated from the French by Julian Scott.*

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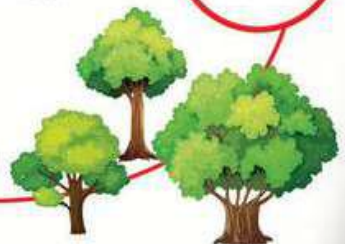
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# **Philosophy in Action: Victory of Light over Darkness**

Compiled by Manjula Nanavati

*This write-up consists of excerpts from a panel discussion around the theme of Philosophy in Action: Victory of Light over Darkness, hosted at the Main Centre of New Acropolis in Mumbai India, as part of the ongoing celebrations of World philosophy Day that New Acropolis spearheaded in over 400 centres across 50 countries. The panellists were all Acropolitan teachers and included Sivan Barzilay, Branch Manager of New Acropolis Main centre in Mumbai, an acropolitan for over 26 years, Harianto Mehta and Rahil Mehta, both Acropolitans for over 14 years.*

**Moderator:** Good evening, everyone. As we begin with the panel discussion, we look for inspiration to Delia Steinberg Guzman, who was our international president for 29 years. We will base our conversation today on her book, *Philosophy for Living*. Let's begin with an excerpt from Delia's book.

***Philosophy that truly answers our deepest questions, has to be practical, very practical. When we have a question and when we are offered an answer, we have to be able to put it into practice in life. If an answer is practical, it means that it has vitality, that I can introduce it into my way of life. If I can't do anything with that answer, why would I want it? If the answer is never going to go beyond my mind, why would I want it? If the answer doesn't solve my problems or difficulties, why would I want it?***

In this light, **what is philosophy for you, and how has it changed you in the years that you have practiced it?**

**Sivan:** Well, as far back as I remember I always had a sense that there is more to life, there is a meaning that I don't yet understand. And a search awakened inside of me. At first, I didn't even know what I was searching for. Today I know that I was searching for a framework, a structure that will help me to understand how to unveil the mysteries of life that I see outside of me. But even more, for a place that will help me to become... and find the ability to follow what I understand as right and true. In other words, to unveil the mysteries within myself.

People can explain and live philosophy in many different ways and each way is valid. But, if I can summarize what it gave to me, well three things, among many. One, it allowed me to develop a very strong compass to discern between right and wrong, between good and bad, between real and non-real. The second thing is it helped me to develop a very clear identity of who am I, and I think that is imperative in today's world when there are so many conflicting pulls. And third, it helped me to live a life of joy, because what is a more beautiful gift than the gift of life?



**Hariato:** I remember that it seemed like there was a scheme of life that was already set out for me. I had to be a good son, a good student, find a good job, get married... I never dared to ask what is the meaning of this 'good'. Nobody ever taught me that this is something you need to discover and identify for yourself. So naturally, I defined good as what others said, and very quickly, I saw myself simply reflecting what society, my parents and my teachers expected. And this is very, very tiring, because one cannot drag oneself through life. One has to have a dream, one has to have some direction. And of course, I didn't know it at the time, but I started on some search. I think this search culminated when I discovered what philosophy really meant: That it's very natural to ask these questions and that in fact, I was not the only one. And more importantly, that as a human being, I have the ability, if I dare, to perceive answers for myself - firstly because there is a tradition of teachings, a direction that has been offered through the human heritage, regardless of religion, culture and geography. And secondly, that there is a framework in which to learn to exercise what these answers imply.

**Moderator:** I would like to connect this with a pertinent quote from Delia's book.

***We are interested in seeing things as they are. Facing reality and accepting the fact that we have been born into this world and into this period of history, it is our responsibility to act to the extent of our possibilities and to feel part of our society with its virtues and its defects.***

So in this light, I want to understand, **what is darkness?**

**Rahil:** It's clear that we are in pretty challenging times. For example, there are wars in different parts of the world, and quickly our attention moves from one to the other. Is it our will that's expressing, or is it social media? At the same time, we are participating in an international celebration of World Philosophy Day, the promotion of which was through social media. So, the same channels can be seen as a challenge, or as an opportunity.

What I want to emphasize, is that darkness and light, we can't speak of one without the other: if we perceive the darkness, uncertainty and confusion, it's almost certain that there is also light lurking somewhere. Now, it's up to us to seek out this light. This is a human reality, and what it means to be a human being; the idea that there is darkness, and there's light, and if we have an inner compass, a manner to cut through this darkness and to bring some clarity, we can find a way forward, and find this light.

And this is a valuable message. Darkness is much more an opportunity, if we can just see it for what it is. Therefore as philosophers can we say with conviction that yes, there is a time of darkness, so what is our work? Let us stand for the light.

**Moderator:** Yes, Delia said something similar...

***We have an absolute faith in the human potentials that lie dormant in the majority of cases. It is just a question of activating them appropriately. In the same way, if we are aware of the cycles of history, we will know that after a confused and violent period, lethargic in terms of spiritual values and driven by material ambitions, there must come another time in which the sanity and the sense of fraternity which today are hidden will be restored.***

So, **how do we utilize this human potential to overcome darkness?**

**Sivan:** I want to tell you a secret. There is only light. There is no darkness. Because darkness is not the opposite of light, it's just the absence of light. So, our focus needs to be on the light and how to work with the light. Because if we don't know how, then the result will be that there will be more darkness ... and in extreme darkness, there are some characteristics and opportunities that we need to learn to identify.

Now, I'm referring to a light that lies within each one of us. Tradition says that millions of years ago there was a moment when those who escort and guide humanity gave us a gift. A gift which can be described as a flame, a spark. Manas, as it is known in Sanskrit. There is no human being that doesn't have this flame. And in times of darkness this flame is great, because it allows us to see a little bit more than what we could if there was only darkness. For light to be transmitted, it's enough that only one person has protected their light, because we don't need much, we need only one light to light up all of humanity. One person that will guard his flame so well that he will be able to enlighten the whole world. Even at its dimmest, it's just a matter of strengthening it. We need to learn to develop it, and to protect it, and especially when there is less light outside, it is even more important that we safeguard it, and strengthen it, so it flourishes.

**Hariato:** It's said in some traditions, that even the gods are envious of human beings, because the gods don't have a choice (they already made their choice). But the human being has a choice: he has the ability to respond to the base desires that pull him into the external world. But he also has the option to really be a god, to dare to live by virtues and morality; the ability to be good as a result of my choice., not as a result of the law, or how other people would see me.

Yes, there is feeling, there is opinion, but there is also the ability to say, wait a minute. Am I able to perceive better? Am I able to choose to be better? We have the ability to truly be givers of light, justice and goodness. But ultimately, it's a matter of choice. And what a great power that as a human being, I have the ability to choose.

**Moderator:** No one disagrees that we should be better, and that we want to be better. But is it really that easy to do? Delia says:

***The experience of everyday life is enough to show us how difficult it is to put our ideas into practice. We often tend to remain on the level of dreams or rather of daydreams which calm our desires and save us from having to make the effort to convert an idea into a tangible reality.***

**How do we convert ideas into a tangible reality in a way that it can impact the world and bring light to the darkness that we see today?**

**Rahil:** I think there's one key that comes from the Indian tradition, that the human being himself has a dual aspect. In the ancient Indian epic, the Mahabharata, there was this legendary,

***...yes, it is difficult. So what? Who promised us an easy life?  
We come here with a purpose: to live life, to grow, to evolve.***

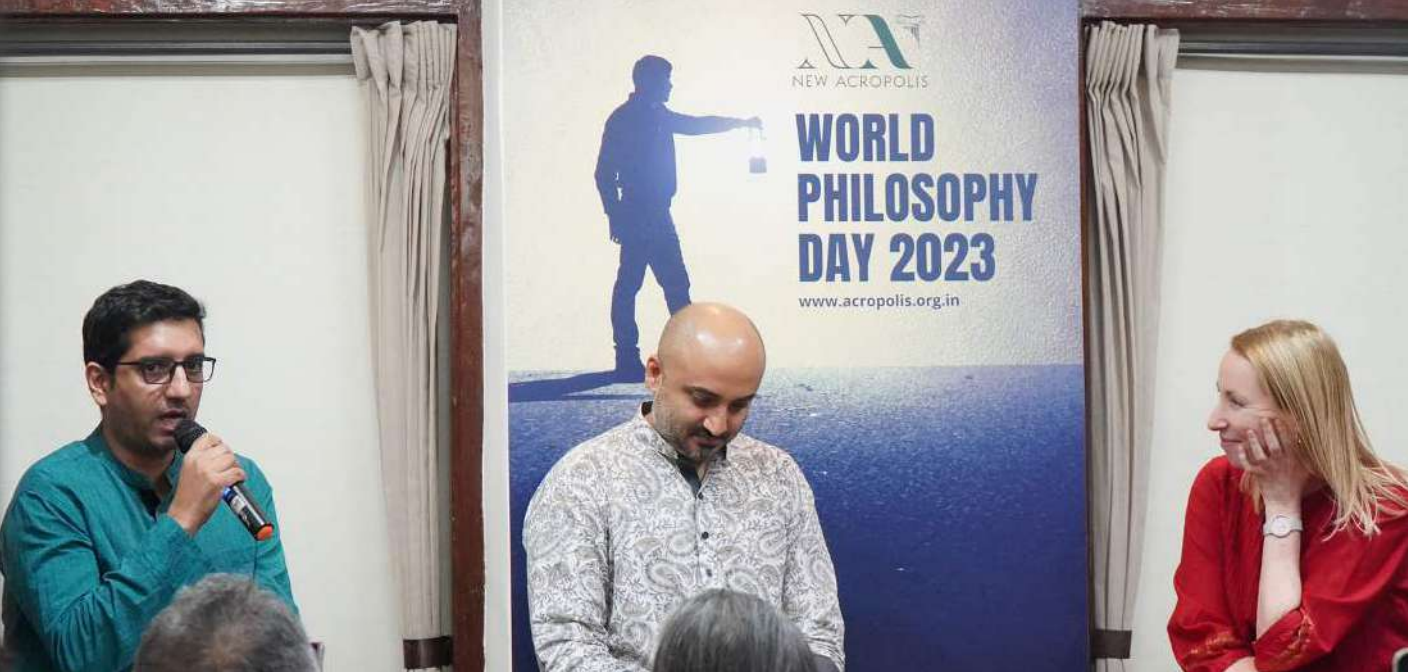
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iconic battle that happened between the Kauravas and the Pandavas. Maybe we can see the Pandavas as the light, the virtues and the strengths that we have. And the Kauravas as those internal challenges that we need to work on, to shed light on, so that we may be more light. I think it's most important and practical to enter into the battlefield and say, this battle is within me - I have the darkness and the light, and I know that it's an eternal turmoil, but I'm going to be the example of transformation.

I also think there's a key in the name New Acropolis. There's new and there's acropolis. What is Acropolis? It's a little fortified, guarded place on top of a hill in Greece. But it's much more than that, because that Acropolis will pass, but what will endure is the idea: the idea of a higher place within each one of us. It's something that we need to guard. And there it is, my goal, my responsibility. New doesn't mean that there's something new to invent. The battle of light over darkness, whether it's the idea of Diwali, or the inner war that we spoke about in the Mahabharata, is not a new idea. But we need to revive these timeless ideas through our actions, in a way that we can be an example that it is possible. Today for example, we are a room full here, and there are maybe 500 rooms like this, across the globe, that are celebrating World Philosophy Day. If everyone plants a seed, a seed naturally grows into a tree, and there you have it - an idea, that we work on together, that becomes a path. This is New Acropolis, this is philosophy in action, this is the victory of light over darkness, not a one-time victory but the idea that this light can be victorious again and again and again.

**Hariato:** I want to share this idea of the spirit of volunteering. From a philosopher's standpoint, I think the spirit of volunteering is something a little bit deeper. Not just an activity to do when I have the time and I'm able to fit it into my calendar. The spirit of volunteering that I refer to is an attitude. It's an identity. For example, how many of you here are fathers? And, when you are unwell, annoyed, stressed with work, do you stop being fathers? What if similarly, we can capture this identity of who I am, as 'a good human being'? And that 'goodness', I volunteer to keep enlightened all the time, everywhere. When things are challenging, I make extra effort to guard my light. And when my light is flourishing, I offer it in the spirit of volunteering to transmit it, to share it.

But to practically build this spirit of volunteering, means to be constantly on the boundaries of our comforts.



If I truly identify as a philosopher, and awaken this identity of the volunteer within me, keeping alive this identity that I belong to, something larger than just my own individual sphere, then I have the ability in spite of a bad mood, to still be generous. I can be not well, or I can be stressed with my finances, but that doesn't need to come at the cost of my ability to serve life. Obviously as a human being, I've come here for something more than my bank balance: to always maintain that identity of the human being.

**Sivan:** To answer your question - is it difficult or easy, yes, it is difficult. So what? Who promised us an easy life? We come here with a purpose: to live life, to grow, to evolve. This concept, which we today value so much, that everything needs to be so comfortable...so comfortable, that we fall asleep, is actually a strange idea. Just look at nature, nothing in nature is so comfortable. There are earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions, all kinds of things which do not make life comfortable. So, I'm not saying that we should not look for comfort, but not as an aim, because then we might fall asleep. And we didn't come here to fall asleep. So the fact that it's difficult, is okay. It's part of the game. It's part of the rules. It's part of life.

Let's learn from the plants. In which direction are they going? Up toward the sun. When you put a seed in the ground, until you see it sprout above the ground, does it go through challenges? Of course! It needs to open its skin and go through the soil, which is sometimes very dry and hard. But it comes out victorious. In which direction does the river go? It goes to the sea. And does it have challenges on the way? Of course. But we are human beings! We want an easy life. We want comfort. Maybe because we have forgotten that we too have a direction. So the question is not whether it's difficult or easy, because it is difficult. So what? It doesn't mean that it's not joyful.

And to add to what Rahil mentioned about the name New Acropolis, *new* refers to the movement forward, and *acro* is a movement upward. But *polis* refers to city, meaning that philosophy is also a social endeavour, implying that to be a philosopher, as we practice it, means that we do it collectively. And there is a key in doing it together: the key is generosity.

If you do it for yourself, you go some part of the way... till it's comfortable. But when you try to be good in order to be an example to others, when a parent is courageous in order to be an example for his child, that takes it much further. And I think that is really the secret of how to allow the light within ourselves to overcome the darkness. It's not easy, but it's possible.

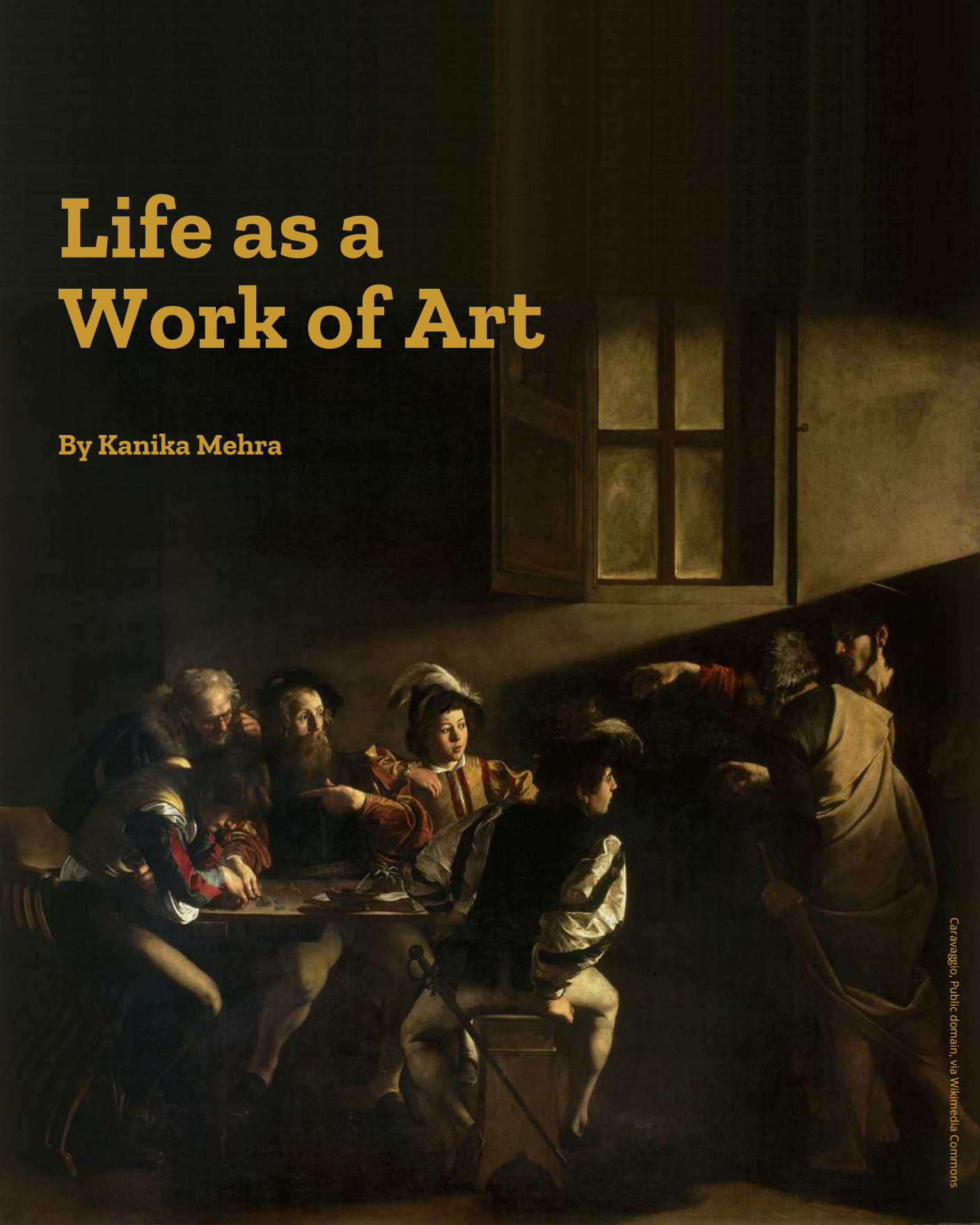
And to tell you the truth, there is no choice. We have to go forward. If life evolves and life goes forward, then human beings also have a role to play. All traditions that speak about the light overcoming the darkness, say that we have inside of us a key that will help not only me to move forward, but all life to move forward. Because we are life. We are part of life that evolves. So do it for others. Take a resolution today: I will do it for somebody else, not for myself. And I promise you, it will work. ☺☺





# Life as a Work of Art

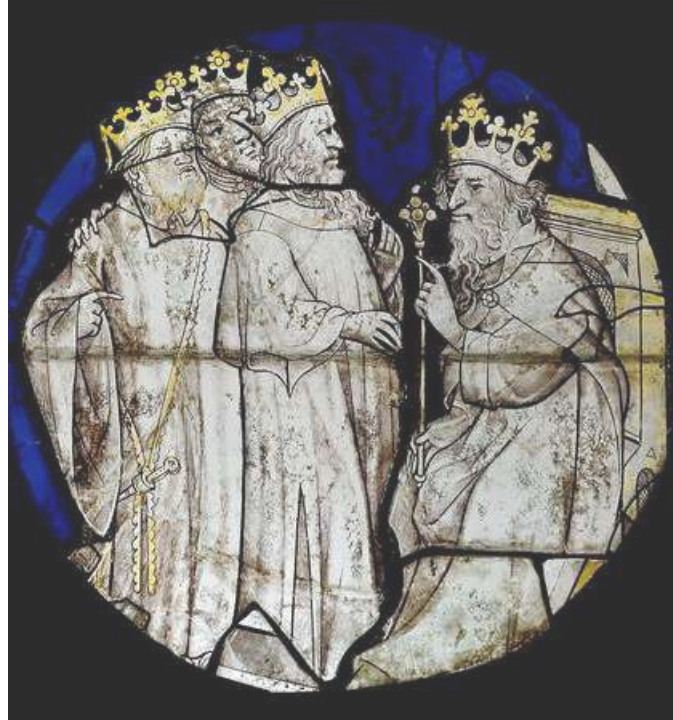
By Kanika Mehra



As far back as I can remember, Art has always been the first language that I could understand and express myself most naturally through. At an early age I was lucky to be exposed to the world of classical art and artists by my grandfather. Every summer vacation when I would arrive at my ancestral home in Kashmir, my grandfather would gift me a book from his library on one of the classical artists and I would spend my summer engrossed for hours, lost in the dramatic and intimate portraits of Rembrandt, the powerful and intense realism of Caravaggio and the visionary world of Da Vinci.

During the pandemic I had the opportunity to do 2 courses in Classical Oil Painting. In this article I would like to share some of my reflections and the learnings that I gained while investigating the life and techniques of renaissance artists and studying Grisaille and Chiaroscuro, which are both classical painting techniques and have been used by artists for centuries.

Grisaille in French means “greyness” and is an art technique commonly used in oil painting, that involves creating an underpainting of monochromatic grey tones to establish form and value. It serves as a foundation for the subsequent layers of colour. After the Grisaille underpainting has dried, many layers of translucent glazes of color are applied which allow for the building of depth and illumination of color. It first appeared in 12th-century stained glass windows, and later in manuscripts, frescos, altarpieces, silks and enamels.(1) It



then became popular in the Renaissance era (14th-17th Century) where artists like Leonardo da Vinci used it in their works. It continued to be used in the Baroque period (17th–18th century) in frescos and murals.

The word Chiaroscuro is Italian in origin: “chiaro” means light and “scuro” means dark. This technique has more ancient roots but gained its popularity during the Italian Renaissance period with artists such

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*Like the shadows bring out the contours and highlights in a painting, the obstacles we face in life sculpt our character and reveal our resilience.*

as Caravaggio, Da Vinci, and Rembrandt. They created the illusion of 3-dimensional form using the contrast of extreme light and shadow.

As an aspiring philosopher, a member of New Acropolis school of philosophy for about 9 years, I have learnt to look at life and all its aspects through the lens of philosophy. As my painting courses progressed I began to realize that I was learning much more than how to add depth to create a beautiful painting; the learnings permeated beyond the boundaries of my canvas into my life.

### **BUILDING CHARACTER**

From Grisaille, I learned how the artist first sets the foundation in monochromatic shades and then applies numerous layers alternately of color and glaze. It is the patient

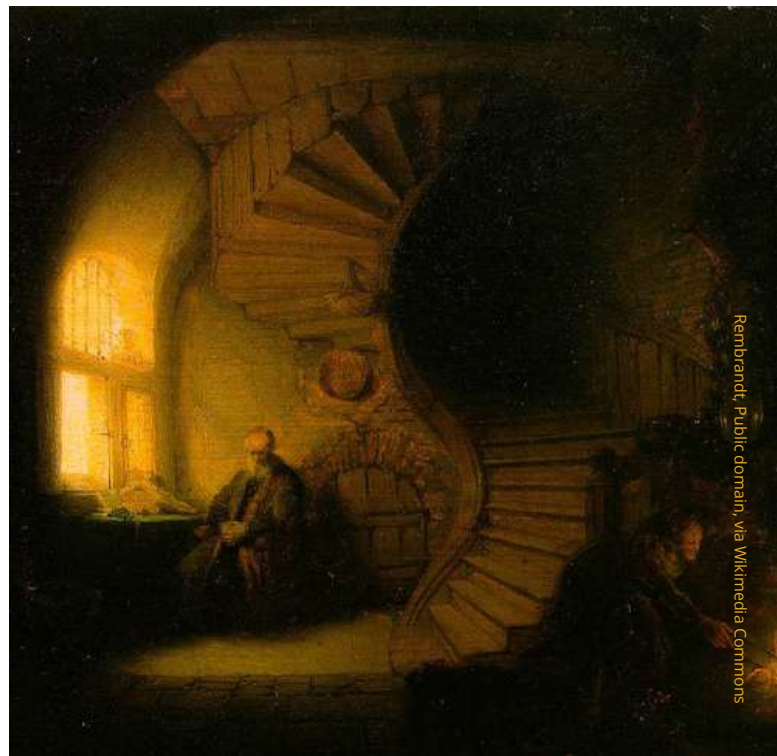
building up of layers of colour that adds beauty, depth and complexity to the artwork.

Similarly, in our life, we too can work on building our character by conscientiously developing qualities such as generosity, courage and compassion. Just as artists work tirelessly to create their masterpieces, we too can look at our lives as masterpieces in progress, in the pursuit of becoming the best of ourselves; but first we need to build a strong foundation of ethical values and virtues, that will bring depth, clarity and meaning to our lives.

### **UNVEILING WHAT IS HIDDEN**

Michelangelo who sculpted the astonishing marble masterpiece, the statue of David, was able to see the beautiful form in an uncarved rock and is

*Just as artists work tirelessly to create their masterpieces, we too can look at our lives as masterpieces in progress, in the pursuit of becoming the best of ourselves.*



famously supposed to have said, “I saw the angel in the marble and carved until I set him free.” While his actual words may have been romanticized in this quote, it is clear what he meant: that he could see the potential of something concealed within the rock and clearly saw how he needed to chisel away all that was extraneous to give it a visible, tangible form.

When we embark on this journey of self-discovery, we too can unveil our hidden strengths and virtues which are already there within us, and reveal our inner beauty and potential. In order to do that we must persevere in looking inwards, and chisel away at everything that is blocking our growth, such as our tendencies and habits that don't serve us.

## **FINDING BALANCE IN LIGHT AND DARKNESS**

Just as in the chiaroscuro technique the artist must maintain a balance between the contrast of light and darkness, we too need to find balance and a deeper understanding between contrasting aspects in our lives. Experiencing moments of sadness allow us to truly appreciate the joyful moments, and moments of weakness become the stepping stones to discover the reservoirs of strength we carry within. It is through acknowledging the shadows that light gains significance, and in understanding our vulnerabilities, strength finds its true potency. These contrasting aspects of our lives even though they may seem contradictory, serve as a compass for self-discovery, when we are able to recognize and work with them together.

## **FINDING BEAUTY IN THE MIDST OF DARKNESS**

To find valuable lessons in challenging circumstances is to be able to see Beauty in the midst of Darkness. Just as an artist uses shadows to create depth in a painting, let us look at the challenges that life brings us as shadows that help us develop strength and a deeper understanding of the meaning of life. Like the shadows bring out the contours and highlights in a painting, the obstacles we face in life sculpt our character and reveal our resilience.

It is this interplay of light and darkness that transforms a 2-dimensional painting to 3 dimensional one, making it lifelike. Much like an artist who embraces shadows to breathe life into a canvas, confronting our



challenges with an adventurous spirit, allows us to tap into our hidden reservoirs of strength and fortitude. It is through these experiences that we grow and transform into more evolved, stronger and wiser human beings.

Perhaps the most important lesson that these art techniques have reiterated to me, is to learn to look at life with a deeper lens: Now, instead of dreading difficult situations, I constantly try to navigate them by understanding that though they seem daunting, they enrich our lives by

contributing to our self-growth. By merely changing our perspective, we can see shadows as opportunities for transformation. I am on this journey, and I have a lot more to work on, but the joy of walking this path and the discoveries it continually brings to light along the way is what I would like to share with you. Like the sculptors' diligent chiseling away to reveal an object of beauty, I invite you to approach life's challenges with a willingness to illuminate and unveil what is hidden within you! ☺☺

#### References:

1. <https://colour-illuminated.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/explore/grisaille-in-manuscript-painting>





## BOOK EXCERPT

# CONCENTRATION & INNER AWAKENING

## According to Tibetan Buddhism

### CONCENTRATION & INNER AWAKENING

According to Tibetan Buddhism

Fernand Schwarz

**By Fernand Schwarz**

The practice of concentration is essential so that each of us can freely build our destiny. It allows us to get out of confusion and helps us to better control ourselves. Concentration exercises in daily life facilitate the development of our ability to overcome obstacles without repression or violence in order to obtain a more harmonious daily life.

Concentration promotes the reappropriation of our memory and the rediscovery of our true identity.

This little book invites us to discover in a simple way the itinerary of our consciousness according to the oral teachings of Tibetan Buddhism. This was the goal of the Lama Blo-bzang Don-yod when, in the 17th century to facilitate the learning

of his disciples, he made a drawing representing the story of a character accompanied by three symbolic animals on a path.

This path shows us the difficulties that we must overcome through simple and accessible mental and physical practices that demand very little of our daily time. Indeed, the key to this method is to permanently do a short practice daily rather than long occasional workshops.

## **CHAPTER ONE THE PATH OF CONCENTRATION**

### **THE MIND**

Considering the mind superficially, it may seem to be at peace, but on closer examination, it becomes clear that the mind never rests. It is like the leaves of a tree that constantly shake in the wind, or the surface of a lake ceaselessly rippled by the by the passing breeze.

In the same way, walking through the streets of a big city, we may not always be aware of the activity around us. We would not notice how busy the surroundings are unless we were to look down upon the scene from the window of a tall building. This is how we would perceive our mind if we were to seriously examine it. It might seem momentarily agitated, but this would only be an impression revealing our previous ignorance of its incessant activity. The constant activity of our mind has a harmful

effect on our present and future life. Though much effort may be required, it is necessary to free our minds from distraction and lack of focus.

### **SCATTEREDNESS OF THE MIND**

An excellent way to become conscious of the dissipation of the mind is the practice of Tratak.

Tratak is a concentration exercise, in which the meditator focuses upon a dot, within a circle, solid or dotted, by managing to eliminate the vision of the circle to keep only the central dot. This exercise gives us a sense of the difficulty of becoming one with a particular object without becoming distracted by the external or internal environment.

This little experiment to reach a goal, though may seem simple, helps us to understand that complications don't come from the outside but from within ourselves.

Concentration is the key to the mastery of speed. Therefore, in martial arts, as we learn to concentrate more, the movements of the adversary appear to be slower. With practice and increasing consciousness the adversary's movements become increasingly slower, although in reality, his speed has not changed.

This applies to daily life as well; with its quick pace and stress that in reality, only exist as a function of the importance that we choose to give it.

For the one who concentrates, everything slows down. It is a question of learning to place the consciousness inside, and not outside, meaning at the centre.

In reality, the events remain the same. We have no control over the events. It is in us that the change takes place, which fundamentally modifies the way we relate to those events.

## **THE GOAL OF CONCENTRATION**

The goal of concentration is to eliminate all obstacles which prevent us from penetrating the object of our concentration; for if we cannot penetrate the object and make it our own, we cannot investigate it.

Investigation is not the study of, but the ability to concentrate on material or spiritual objects and to be able to penetrate them to make contact with their essence.

Concentration is not only a system of vigilance, something useful for everyday life, it is also the key to inspiration and understanding.

Right concentration opens the access to wisdom because wisdom is the ability to fully possess the object in which one has placed one's mind, and this, without any obstacles. This is what the Hindu tradition refers to as dhyana, or meditation.

Concentration, which enables control over

the mind, is the basis of meditation.

If we can learn to concentrate properly, we will have the energy to meditate because it is concentration that sustains meditation. Concentration is therefore the light we have within us. If we have no access to this light, we depend on our external senses to move forward and our progress suffers.

Fuelled by concentration, meditation will amplify the light; the thing we focus on will become more illuminated and we will begin to see things better as they are.

## **CONCENTRATION AND MEDITATION**

In order to see the drawings on the walls of a dark room, we can use a candle; if there is a breeze the flame of the candle will flicker, and if its light is insufficient the drawings will not appear clearly to us. The meditator is like the one who wants to see the drawings. The drawings are the objects or the thoughts upon which he tries to concentrate. His mind is the flame of the candle. The weakness of the flame reflects the numbness of his mind and the distractions are represented by the breeze that makes the flame flicker.

If the candle we use does not light the room sufficiently, we will be unable to make out the drawings on the wall. Therefore, the light of the candle must be increased, that is to say, the numbness and drowsiness of the mind must be eliminated.



## SEE THE ESSENTIAL

It is not important to see everything, but to see what is essential.

Therefore, concentration implies taking a rest from all "secondary" activities in order to bring peace, which makes it possible to reach unity without interruption. At the beginning of this journey, it is necessary to choose a question, only one question, it doesn't matter which one, as long as it is the most essential one for us. This question must become the object of our concentration, our meditation and all that we do must allow us to always come back to this same question.

It is not necessary to understand everything; if we answer this one question, the others will also be answered.

## THE MYSTERY OF UNITY

This is all the difficulty that lies behind the mystery of unity. In the Tratak exercise, you will certainly succeed in erasing the circle from your mind, but sometimes it will come back, and sometimes unrelated thoughts or feelings will come up. And all this will happen within a very short period of time.

When you have this type of experience, things appear very diverse, broken up and fragmentary.

This exercise actually reveals the difficulties that we have in coming together as a unit, that is in being one. It reveals the state of distraction we live in and the difficulty we have in maintaining our concentration. According to Tibetan Buddhism, this awakening of the consciousness makes us aware of our difficulty in perceiving ourselves as a unit and in acting accordingly. Even if, intellectually, we manage to conceive of ourselves as one, practically, we do not function as one.

The journey of consciousness is simply to perceive things as they are, in their unity, without judging them, comparing them, and without useless qualms.



**A review of some of the activities that New Acropolis Mumbai and Pune hosted during October, November & December.**

## PHILOSOPHY

Varied lectures and discussions were hosted this quarter including **Finding a Way out of the Maze - Lessons from Mythology, Balancing the Scales of Life: Exploration of the Way of the Heart, Practical Learnings From The Life of Socrates.**



To mark **Winter Solstice**, the longest night of the year, the members came together on the evening of 19th Dec for moments of reflection, inspired by artistic performances encompassing music, poetry, dance and drama, showcasing the philosophical approach in aligning with the cycles of Nature and the rhythm of Life.



However, it was the celebrations to commemorate **World Philosophy Day** that took centre-stage. A UNESCO initiative to emphasize the role of philosophy in helping to bring about change in individuals and societies, World Philosophy Day is celebrated by New Acropolis in over 50 countries and 400 centres all over the world. The presentations around the theme of Philosophy in Action, Victory of light over Darkness included an interactive panel discussion and demonstration held at the Mumbai centre, (which is extensively covered in this issue), while the Pune branch made waves with a theatrical presentation at 'The Base', a theatre in Erandwane, Pune.





The theatrical act was followed by an address by Shraddha Shetty – Branch Manager of New Acropolis Pune, where she reiterated, that while World Philosophy Day is an important day to mark the significance of philosophy, in New Acropolis, philosophy is a part of everyday life, a living, dynamic force to explore our own human potential that can inspire real-world change.



## CULTURE

On the 29th of October 2023, New Acropolis Culture Circle hosted a musical performance **Celebrating Carnatic Music : A Philosophical Concert with Chandana Bala Kalyan** at the main center in Colaba. Beyond her vocal prowess, Chandana offered profound insights into her learnings of how music can serve as a pathway to becoming the best versions of ourselves. She seamlessly integrated Folk music from several parts of India and a popular Jazz piece using her Carnatic heritage, demonstrating her musical versatility and creativity.



## VOLUNTEERING



### ***Seminar with Volunteers at Manav Bustan Rural Centre***

Around 60 volunteers, members of New Acropolis Main Centre and Pune Branch spent a weekend filled with enriching activities and meaningful interactions at the Manav Bustan Rural Centre in Mangaon.

The seminar included a series of engaging activities to promote fraternity and a shared sense of purpose among the volunteers. A nature walk through the outdoors in the morning not only provided a refreshing break from urban life but also a learning session on the concept of sacred groves and their importance in our ecological system. As evening fell, the group gathered around the campfire creating a warm and inviting atmosphere for sharing thoughts and ideas while singing songs, a time-honoured tradition that brings people together, further enhancing the sense of camaraderie.



The focus of the seminar extended beyond interactions, delving into philosophical concepts that inspire a collective commitment to positive change. Volunteers engaged in thoughtful discussions, exploring ways to implement these ideas in their daily lives and contribute to the betterment of our community.





...AND CONGRATULATIONS!

## Coverage in Pune Mirror and The Indian Express



**Pune: New Acropolis school of philosophy performs a theatrical in Erandwane**

New Acropolis Pune branch, a school of philosophy marked this important occasion in Pune on the advent of the festival of Diwali, through a theatrical presentation titled 'Victory of Light over Darkness' in the theatre 'The Base' in Erandwane

By PuneMirror Bureau | Reported By **Eeshwari Jedhe** | Tue, 7 Nov 2023 | 11:39 am



Theatrical presentation titled 'Victory of Light over Darkness' in the theatre 'The Base' in Erandwane

To read the full article in **Pune Mirror** [Click Here](#)



**The Indian EXPRESS**  
JOURNALISM OF COURAGE

Home Cities India Explained Opinion Business Enter

**World Philosophy Day: The truth isn't just out there — it's in you**

Philosophy is to begin to discover the unbreakable connection between the individual and the whole. As we delve deeper into discovering who we truly are, it can provide a clearer direction on how we can live better, more in tune with ourselves, and consequently with life at large



Before reforming systems and policies, a return to our roots may be in order. (Image courtesy: Wikimedia Commons/adapted by New Acropolis India)

Written by Trishya Screwala +1 More

Updated: November 16, 2023 16:36 IST

To read the full article in **The Indian Express** [Click Here](#)

## An Interview with Radio Fever 94.3 FM

RJ Tarun from Radio Fever 94.3 FM hosted Shraddha Shetty – the branch manager of New Acropolis, Pune, in a radio interview, which offered a glimpse into the ways that philosophical thinking can be seamlessly integrated into everyday life. The interview demystified common misconceptions surrounding the practicality of philosophy and addressed lingering doubts about its relevance in the hustle and bustle of daily existence.



## A new Living Philosophy Course in Bandra, Mumbai.

In order to extend our reach in the city of Mumbai, and in keeping with the rhythm of our regular Living Philosophy courses that are hosted in our main centre at Colaba, about 4 times a year, a new course was initiated at The Yoga House, a popular studio cum café in the young and trendy precinct of Bandra. This constitutes yet another stepping stone in our efforts to transmit practical wisdom from the Ancient Traditions to all those in search of it.



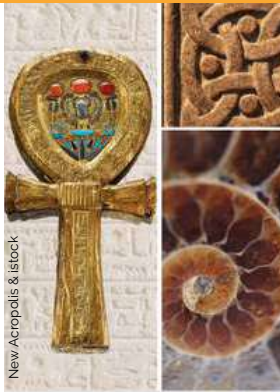
# PUBLIC EVENTS NEW ACROPOLIS MUMBAI

**Sat  
27 Jan**

Free Workshop

**6 pm (2 hrs)  
at Mumbai Center  
(Colaba)**

[Register Here](#)



## DECODING SYMBOLS: THE LANGUAGE OF LIFE

"It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; that which is essential is invisible to the eye" - Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

Ancient symbols such as the Ankh, Yin-yang or the Pyramids, awaken our interest even today. Aspiring philosophers of New Acropolis Mumbai invite you to explore the mysterious and universal language of symbols – to unearth deeper truths about life and our role as human beings.

**Sat  
10 Feb**

Free Workshop

**6 pm (2 hrs)  
at Mumbai Center  
(Colaba)**

[Register Here](#)



## DISCOVERING LIFE'S BEAUTY: AN EVENING OF PHILOSOPHY & POETRY

Life is full of Beauty. In the search for it, so many poems have been written, so many people have been inspired beyond the mundane. How can we better grasp Beauty and be able to feel, think and act more beautifully in our day to day?

**Sat  
24 Feb**

Free Workshop

**6 pm (2 hrs)  
at Mumbai Center  
(Colaba)**

[Register Here](#)



## LEARNING TO SEE DEEPLY: LESSONS FROM NATURE

"Look deep into nature, and then you will understand everything better" – Albert Einstein

What can we learn about the cycles of seasons to deal with the ups and downs in our lives? What can we learn about individual and collective growth, by drawing inspiration from nature's intelligence and harmony? Volunteers of New Acropolis invite you to explore the infinite wisdom nature has to offer... if only we learn to see more deeply.

# PUBLIC EVENTS NEW ACROPOLIS MUMBAI

**Sat  
2 Mar**

Free Workshop

**6 pm (2 hrs)  
at Mumbai Center  
(Colaba)**

[Register Here](#)



## WHAT DO WE DO WITH THE MIND & THE HEART?

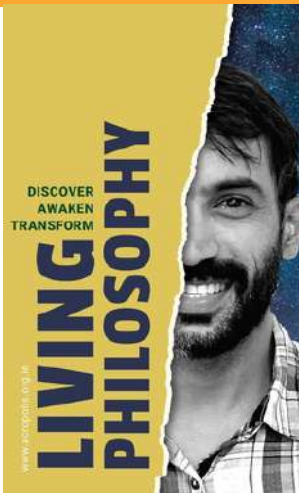
Our mind can be a powerful tool towards action, yet at the same time, can also cause paralysing indecision. Our heart often knows what is right, but tends to get lost amidst high emotions and impulsive actions. How can we learn to better use the tools of our head and our heart, to bring more clarity and contentment to our daily choices?

**Tue  
5 Mar**

Free Introduction

**7:30 pm (2 hrs)  
at Mumbai Center  
(Colaba)**

[Register Here](#)



## FREE INTRODUCTION TO LIVING PHILOSOPHY COURSE

**2 hours once a week | 20 weeks  
to discover Philosophy as a Way of Life**

Living Philosophy is an opportunity to discover ourselves and the world around us, with the insights of ancient philosophies and human wisdom put into practice in everyday life. Extract practical tools through the course to learn to live with more freedom and sustained happiness. Explore the path of inner change as a key to actively contribute towards building a better world.

**This event is a Free Introduction to learn more about what this course offers.**

**Sat  
16 Mar**

Free Workshop

**6 pm (2 hrs)  
at Mumbai Center  
(Colaba)**

[Register Here](#)



## LIVING AUTHENTICALLY: AN ENCOUNTER WITH BUDDHA & SOCRATES

How can I stay true to myself, in a world where boundaries between real and unreal are becoming increasingly blurred? Join aspiring philosophers of New Acropolis Mumbai as we draw inspiration from the life and teachings of the Buddha and Socrates - two inspiring figures of the East and West, who dedicated their lives to coming closer to the true nature of things.

# PUBLIC EVENTS NEW ACROPOLIS PUNE

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Sat  
3 Feb

Free  
Philosophical  
Talk  
6 pm (2 hrs)  
at Pune Branch  
[Register Here](#)



## CONFUCIUS – LEARNING TO BRING BALANCE

Often, we feel out of balance – going from one extreme of acting with constant stress and pressure, to complete rest and inaction on the other hand.. **But perhaps the secret to balance and meaningful living lies somewhere in between.**

Confucius was a teacher, philosopher and political theorist, and considered to be a paragon of Chinese sages for his wisdom. Based on reverence, justice and kindness, his teachings can guide us to bring some balance and meaning within ourselves and our surroundings.

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Sat  
10 Feb

Free  
Philosophical  
Talk  
6 pm (2 hrs)  
at Pune Branch  
[Register Here](#)



## PRACTICAL PHILOSOPHY - LESSONS FROM MARCUS AURELIUS

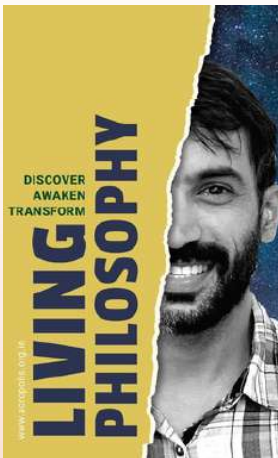
What makes us truly content – a comfortable life, or a life aligned to the values we define as important for ourselves? Stoic philosophers offer many lessons on living with more clarity, purpose and happiness that are as relevant for us today.

**Join us as we will extract some lessons of practical philosophy, found in Meditations, the writings of Marcus Aurelius** who was a scholar, military leader, Roman Emperor and a Stoic Philosopher of 2nd century AD Rome.

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Thu  
15 Feb

Free Introduction  
7:30 pm (2 hrs)  
at Pune Branch  
[Register Here](#)



## FREE INTRODUCTION SESSION TO LIVING PHILOSOPHY COURSE

20 week course | 2 hours once a week

Living Philosophy is an opportunity to discover ourselves and the world around us, with the insights of ancient philosophies and human wisdom put into practice in everyday life. Extract practical tools through the course to learn to live with more freedom and sustained happiness. Explore the path of inner change as a key to actively contribute towards building a better world.

This event is a Free Introduction to learn more about what this course offers.

## PUBLIC EVENTS NEW ACROPOLIS PUNE

Sat  
2 Mar

Free  
Philosophical  
Talk  
6 pm (2 hrs)  
at Pune Branch  
[Register Here](#)



### ARJUNA'S DILEMMA – DARING TO CHOOSE

Every day brings us countless choices, leaving us either empowered as we steer our lives in the direction we choose, or leaving us confused and exhausted with many options in front of us. In such moments of confusions, how can we learn to choose with more clarity and decisiveness?

**Let's draw inspiration from Arjuna, the great hero of the Bhagwad Gita, as we develop the art and courage to choose meaning.**

Sat  
16 Mar

Free  
Philosophical  
Talk  
6 pm (2 hrs)  
at Pune Branch  
[Register Here](#)



### SEEKING UNION –AN EVENING WITH RUMI

"I belong to no religion, my religion is love. Every heart is my temple."  
(Jalal-Adin Rumi)

Join us as we read from the beautiful poetry of Rumi Jalal-Adin Muhammad Balkhi, who is mostly known simply as Rumi (1207-1273), was a Persian poet, scholar, philosopher, teacher and a Sufi mystic. In his writings and teachings, Rumi describes how love grows and ripens when one is transcending towards the Divine. He encourages his listeners to be awake and to live, showing us glory and beauty in ourselves and each other...

**The Pune Branch has a new address!**

**Row house No. E-6, Gera Classics Condominium,  
Next to St. Meera College, Koregaon Park Road,  
Pune, Maharashtra, 411001**

**Ph no: +91 92842 63882**



**NEW ACROPOLIS PRESENTS**  
**THE UNIVERSAL**  
**LANGUAGE OF RHYTHM**  
**DANCE PERFORMANCE & TALK**  
**with Kathak dancer Aditi Bhagwat**



Images courtesy: Aditi Bhagwat



**SUN 21ST JAN 2024 | 6-8 PM**  
**NEW ACROPOLIS CENTRE, COLABA**

**A proud member of the**  
**Mumbai Festival 2024**

**[REGISTRATION REQUIRED](#)**  
**[CLICK HERE](#)**

**Contact us at: 96532 95816 /**  
**mumbai@acropolis.org**



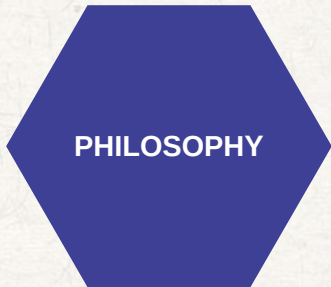
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Philosophy, when it is practical, is educational. It helps us to know ourselves and to improve ourselves. To be a philosopher is a way of life committed to the best aspirations of humanity.



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 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.



## OUR CENTERS

### MUMBAI (CENTRE)

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