

# The Acropolis

Philosophy for today

Includes:

**Viktor Frankl's  
Search for  
Meaning**

**The Irish Rain  
Forest**

**Philosophy in  
India**

**and more**

Art - Culture - History - Philosophy and more

Free please take



Nov 2024 - Issue 19



## What is The Acropolis?

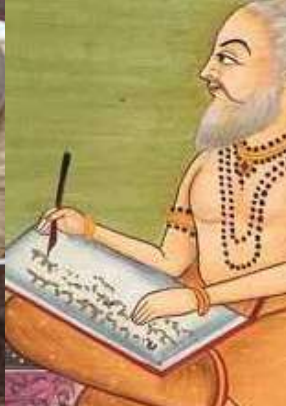
In ancient Athens the Acropolis, literally meaning the High City, was the place which supported the highest ideals of the people.

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

## About Us

New Acropolis is an international organisation working in the fields of philosophy, culture and volunteering. Our aim is to revive philosophy as a means of renewal and transformation and to offer a holistic education that can develop both our human potential as well as the practical skills needed in order to meet the challenges of today and to create a better society.

For further details please visit: [www.acropolis.ie](http://www.acropolis.ie)



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# Editorial : Homeless outreach - a step towards others and an opportunity for sharing

More and more people are living rough and have no means of support. Voluntary organisations provide them with meals, care and, in some cases, accommodation. In Dublin and Cork, teams of volunteers provide something more essential: human connection.

New Acropolis School of Philosophy regularly organises social initiatives, in particular outreaches to the homeless. Many people want to take part and bring them a sandwich or a hot drink. But this simple approach can go much further.

Surveys have shown that one of the primary needs expressed by the homeless is to be socially connected, along with having a fixed place to stay, paradoxical as this may seem. Food and clothing take second place.

At the end of our outreach, volunteers almost always say: 'It's not that difficult to talk to homeless people. Often, they are the ones who make us feel at ease'. The preconceived notion of the homeless as aggressive or asocial and the fear of appearances deprive many volunteers of the inner drive that would enable them to talk to them. The fear of being solicited for a coin, this indelicate commercial exchange based on the relationship between pity and money, often makes individual good intentions feel unworthy. This draws a line between the homeless and the volunteer. How do you cross it? You simply have to cross this line naturally and authentically. Crossing this boundary is like entering the home of someone you don't know for the first time: you introduce yourself, try to understand who they are, what their interests are... and a bond is created. For a moment, or for a long time.

As philosophers, we see it as both an exercise and a duty to go out on the streets. It's an opportunity to create a human bond, a fraternal bond that transcends differences. We're not there to judge. It's all about listening, we can ask the person what they need. We never ask them why they are there, or how they got there... We give the gift of our presence, and we don't ask for anything. If we listen, the homeless person will say what they have to say, without insisting.

Simple, genuine relationships

With time and regular visits, the homeless people with whom we form a bond even get to know us. Relationships are natural and simple. Of course, there are delicate moments, sometimes difficult, but these moments simply require us to lay ourselves bare and not pretend.

Whatever decision the volunteer makes after the outreach, whether not to do it again or to repeat the experience, his or her outlook has changed, because it's no

longer possible to pretend that the homeless person you meet on the street corner doesn't exist.

Social volunteering at New Acropolis is an expression of philosophical civic responsibility and friendship. It is a form of action that is both utterly human and fundamentally necessary.

Alain Impellizzeri  
Director New Acropolis Ireland

**Over the course of 2024, The Acropolis Magazine will publish and distribute four quarterly editions delving into many essential aspects of culture and society.**

**We believe a healthy society is one that is educated, diverse and open to ideas and timeless values. With this in mind, the magazine is a publication outlet for our members who wish to use this medium as an opportunity to research and explore various themes, topics and reflections in life.**

**All articles in the magazine are contributions by members of New Acropolis. Research and views expressed in each article are those of the individual authors and may not represent the collective views of New Acropolis.**

**We hope you enjoy!**

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# Work, Love and Suffering

## *Viktor Frankl's search for meaning*

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Viktor Frankl, a renowned Holocaust survivor, psychiatrist, and philosopher, made significant contributions to psychology with his development of 'logotherapy' and his work on existential analysis. Born in Vienna on March 26, 1905, Frankl earned his medical degree and later a PhD in philosophy, specialising in psychiatry and neurology. His experiences as a prisoner in Nazi concentration camps during World War II profoundly shaped his views on human resilience and this experience led to the writing of his most famous work 'Man's Search For Meaning'.

Frankl and his family, who were Jewish, were captured by the Nazis in 1942, nine months after his wedding. Despite having a visa to escape to the United States, Frankl chose to stay in Austria to care for his family. He was imprisoned in four different concentration camps, including the notorious Auschwitz, for over three years. His father, mother, wife, and brother perished during this time—his father died of starvation and pneumonia, while his wife, mother, and brother were murdered in gas chambers. Only his sister Stella escaped the Holocaust, fleeing to Australia.

It was within the brutal confines of these camps that Frankl observed human behaviour in the face of extreme suffering. In "Man's Search for Meaning," written in just nine days in 1946, Frankl chronicles these experiences and it serves as a



Frankl was imprisoned in four different concentration camps including the notorious Auschwitz. Photo - Auschwitz- Wikimedia

psychological memoir of survival and meaning. Initially published anonymously in Germany under the title "A Psychologist Experiences the Concentration Camp," the book was later renamed and published in English in 1959 as "Man's Search for Meaning." It remains one of the most influential books ever written, having sold over sixteen million copies and been translated into more than fifty languages.

The book's central philosophy is Frankl's theory of 'logotherapy', which he had developed in the 1930s and is based on the concept of the "will to meaning," which posits that the primary motivation in human life is the search for meaning. This theory diverges from Sigmund Freud's "will to pleasure" and Alfred Adler's "will to power." Frankl believed that even in the most painful and dehumanising circumstances, individuals could find meaning in their suffering, thereby gaining the strength to endure it. He famously stated, "When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves."

Logotherapy encourages individuals to find purpose in life through three main avenues:

**Work** - especially when it is creative and serves a greater purpose.

**Love** - particularly through the service of others.

**Suffering** - which Frankl argued is intrinsic to the human experience and can become a source of meaning.

Frankl's approach emphasises personal responsibility and freedom of choice. He believed that even under the harshest conditions, individuals retained the freedom to choose their attitude and response. He recounted how some prisoners, though physically broken, managed to survive by clinging to a purpose or vision for the future. Conversely, those who lost hope often perished quickly, as exemplified by Frankl's story of a fellow prisoner who died on the very day he believed the war would end.

After the war, Frankl returned to academia, where he continued to develop his theories. He earned a PhD in philosophy with a dissertation titled "The Unconscious God," which explored the relationship between psychology and spirituality. He was appointed a professor of neurology and psychiatry at the University of Vienna in 1955 and also served as a visiting professor at Harvard University and other institutions around the world.

Frankl passed away on September 2, 1997, at the age of 92. His legacy lives on through his writings and the therapeutic practice of logotherapy, which has inspired millions to find meaning in their lives, regardless of their circumstances.

David Murtagh



FootingTheTurf - Drumlish, Longford 2016

# The Irish Rain Forest

## *A journey through Ireland's unique Peatland Bogs*

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What are “peatland bogs” and why should we protect them? A bog is a type of wetland landscape that accumulates organic material called peat from dead plant matter, particularly from mosses. They are to be found in many parts of Ireland, especially in the midlands and mountainous west. Bogs are not unique to Ireland, but in Europe only Finland has more boglands than this country, relatively speaking. The largest area of bog in the world is thought to be under the permafrost of Siberia. Attitudes toward Ireland’s boglands have evolved over the last century. Opinion on these wetlands has evolved from being considered wastelands, to being used as a fuel resource, and now are increasingly regarded as distinctive and valuable habitats that must be protected and preserved. Indeed, the boglands of Ireland have had significant cultural, historical and ecological value to Irish society throughout the ages.

The story of our boglands starts at the end of the last ice-age, about 12,000 years ago. During that ice-age most of Europe was covered in an ice sheet, to a depth of several kilometres. The ice sheet over Ireland is believed to have been about one kilometre deep. The melting of the ice sheet led to the formation of lakes, and the growth of trees and vegetation, especially mosses, around those lakes. When the vegetation died, the resultant organic material built up, layer upon layer, and with time, turned to peat. However, bog formation is a slow process, taking approximately a thousand years to ‘grow’ one metre of peat. Thus, over the millenia, the boglands were formed.



Although most bogs appear similar, there are in fact two very distinct types: Blanket Bogs are expansive, generally formed in wet or upland areas with high rainfall, such as the west of Ireland. Raised Bogs are smaller, generally formed in lowland areas, like the Irish midlands. They get their name from their dome-like shape, caused by the buildup of peat underneath a top layer of vegetation. Blanket bogs are shallow when compared to the much deeper raised bogs, the deepest of which in Ireland is 15 metres in depth.

Rural Irish families have used dried peat/turf as a fuel for cooking and heating, in a centuries-old tradition that is deeply rooted in our culture. This involved summer trips to the local bog to “cut the turf”. Domestic turf-cutting is a manual process, using a specialised two-sided spade called a “sleán”. The peat bank is cut into small blocks called “sods” and these are spread out on nearby ground to dry. After a week or two, the turf would be stacked into small structures (called “footing”) to aid further drying by air circulation. In its natural (uncut) state, peat consists of about 90% water, which makes it easy to cut, but it takes months for it to dry fully. Of course, the drying time is weather dependent. Finally, the dried turf would be transported home and stacked into a mound or “rick” near the house, ready for use as fuel. The legal right to cut turf for domestic use is known as ‘turbery’, and applies to boglands used as commonage (shared by the community).

Ireland has very limited fossil fuel resources, such as oil, coal and natural gas, a factor that increased demand for peat as an indigenous source of energy. During the Second World War, coal imports from Britain were restricted. So in 1946 the Irish government founded a state company called Bord na Móna or BNM, (English: “The Peat Board”) to manage state exploitation of peat bog resources. The new company developed peat harvesting operations, mainly in the midland counties of Offaly and Kildare. Machinery such as peat milling machines and light railways were introduced to increase production. The resulting milled peat was used as the raw material in a range of products. These included “BNM Peat Briquettes”, a domestic heating fuel, aimed at urban customers who did not have the opportunity to harvest turf themselves. Another market for peat was in horticulture. Moss, typically a species called “Sphagnum”, is an important component of peat. Peat moss is used by gardeners to manage the acidity of their garden soil by adding the acidic peat to the soil. BNM also introduced electricity generation at three locations. Milled peat was burnt to power these stations, with the resultant electricity supplied to the national electricity grid.

Ireland’s peatlands are an internationally significant repository of archeological sites and artefacts. Over the centuries, many important discoveries have been made in bogs all over Ireland. Because of the bog’s natural preservative qualities, objects of metal, wood, leather and fabrics can survive for thousands of years in good condition. Finds date from the Stone, Iron, and Bronze Ages, as well as from the more recent Christian era. They include metal jewellery, such as gold brooches, neck collars, pendants, bracelets and ornaments. Also found were weapons such as

swords, spears, axe-heads and arrow-heads. Significant finds of “bog bodies” and even “bog butter” have also been discovered. These discoveries provide insights into the lives and beliefs of people who lived in Ireland thousands of years ago.

In Bronze Age societies the practice of burying hoards of metal objects in lakes, rivers and other waterlogged locations such as bogs was common. The reasons for this practice may include safe-keeping in times of danger, accidental loss, and ritual or votive offerings as part of religious ceremonies. The difficulty in recovering objects from bogs or other wet sites suggests that in some cases they were never intended to be retrieved. An example of such a hoard is the Derrynaflan Hoard, found in County Tipperary in 1980, on the bogland site of an ancient monastery. The hoard consisted of five Christian altar vessels, including an ornate silver chalice decorated in gold filigree, known as the Derrynaflan Chalice. The vessels have been dated to between the 8th and 9th centuries CE. It is thought that, in a time of Viking raids on monasteries, the hoard was buried for safe keeping.

“Bog Butter” has been found on numerous occasions buried deep in Irish boglands. This consists of a form of butter made from milk or animal fats and stored in a container. The oldest bog butter find was made in County Offaly, Ireland in 2011. It consisted of a wooden container weighing 50 kg, filled with butter. The find was dated to around 5,000 years ago, during the Iron Age. Archaeologists believe the butter was mixed with added herbs and buried in the bog for preservation and



Examples of bog butter recovered from Irish bogs - The National Museum of Ireland

flavour maturation. It would have been retrieved later in the year, perhaps for a religious ceremony. Butter may also have been buried as an offering to the pagan spirits or gods, as a sacrifice for a good harvest, for favourable weather, or for the health of the king.

Perhaps the most unusual discoveries in Irish bogs are what are called “bog bodies”. These human corpses were buried in boglands as long as thousands of years ago. Biological conditions in the bog enabled a form of natural mummification to preserve the body. Cold temperatures, acidic water, and an oxygen-free environment prevented the normal bacterial decay from progressing. Skin, tanned a deep brown by the action of tannins, is well preserved, and some internal organs, as well as hair and nails are also preserved. Curiously, the skeleton is not usually well preserved, due to the dissolving of the bones as a result of the acidic environment. There are several bog bodies on display in Dublin at the National Museum of Ireland: Archaeology, in the Kingship & Sacrifice exhibition. The oldest is called Cashel Man, discovered in 2011 in Cashel Bog, County Laois. The body has been radio-carbon dated to have lived and died during the Early Bronze Age, over four thousand years ago. Cashel Man is believed to have been a young man who was killed as a human sacrifice, based on the evidence of his injuries. The location of the find was also significant - at the boundary of territories, overlooked by a hill. Bog bodies tend to be found at territorial boundaries between kingdoms, or close to hills that are thought to be the location of inauguration ceremonies for newly crowned kings. Archaeologists believe that ritual human sacrifice was an important aspect of kingship.

Evidence of early farming practices have also been revealed. In the 1930's in County Mayo, a man cutting turf in his local bog found a regular formation of stone walls beneath the peat bog. He had discovered what is now known as the Céide Fields, a Neolithic farming landscape, preserved under a blanket bog. The stone-walled fields, extending over hundreds of hectares, are the oldest known globally, dating back between 3,000 and 5,500 years. The remains of houses and megalithic tombs were also found. During the several thousand years that passed, ecological conditions changed, and as a result a blanket bog grew to cover the site. Today the Céide Fields has a visitor centre to inform and educate the public of the significance of the site. Boglands have inspired Irish art, literature, and folklore. They are deeply embedded in the national identity, symbolising both the resilience of nature and the connection between people and the land. Preserving boglands thus carries not only environmental benefits but also the protection of Ireland's cultural heritage.

The ecological value of Irish boglands cannot be underestimated. Often referred to as Ireland's rain forest, these living bogs are unique wetland ecosystems, and are among the most ecologically significant landscapes in Ireland and the world. Comprising about 17% of Ireland's land area, these bogs include raised bogs, blanket bogs, and fens (a peat-accumulating wetland fed by mineral-rich ground or surface water). They each play an essential role in biodiversity conservation,



carbon sequestration (carbon storage in peat) and water regulation. As these boglands face threats from human activity and climate change, understanding their ecological value is critical for promoting their preservation.

Boglands play an important role as a habitat for a diverse range of flora and fauna. They are home to many specialised species that have adapted to the nutrient-poor, waterlogged conditions. In these environments, species such as bog rosemary, bog cotton, and the insect-eating sundew thrive. Mosses, particularly sphagnum moss, are key to the bog ecosystem, absorbing water and helping create the acidic conditions characteristic of peatlands. These habitats also support a variety of wildlife, including endangered species like the hen harrier, curlew, and the Irish hare. The blanket bogs in the west of Ireland, for instance, provide essential breeding grounds for birds such as the golden plover and merlin. Insects like dragonflies and beetles, as well as amphibians such as frogs also depend on these wetland areas for survival. Bogs represent ecosystems where life has adapted to extreme conditions, contributing to overall biodiversity.

Irish boglands play a vital role in climate regulation, particularly through their ability to sequester, or store carbon. Peatlands are some of the most efficient carbon sinks on the planet, storing an estimated 30% of global soil carbon despite covering only 3% of the Earth's surface. In Ireland, peat bogs store vast quantities of carbon, accumulated over thousands of years. When bogs are healthy and intact, they actively sequester carbon from the atmosphere through the growth of sphagnum moss and other vegetation, which eventually turns into peat. This process prevents carbon from contributing to the greenhouse effect and helps mitigate climate change.

However, when bogs are damaged by drainage, peat extraction, or agricultural conversion, they release stored carbon back into the atmosphere, contributing to the acceleration of climate change. In this way, preserving Irish boglands is not only crucial for biodiversity but also for reducing carbon emissions and meeting Ireland's climate targets.

Irish boglands also play a significant role in water regulation. Peatlands have a high capacity for water retention, absorbing large quantities of rainfall and releasing it slowly over time. This function reduces the risk of flooding in nearby lowland areas, particularly during heavy rainfall. Blanket bogs in upland areas act as natural sponges, preventing rapid runoff into rivers and minimising the likelihood of downstream floods. Bogs also contribute to water purification by filtering nutrients and contaminants from the water.


Despite their ecological and cultural importance, Irish boglands have faced significant threats from human activity. Historically, bogs have been drained for agriculture, cut for peat extraction, and planted with non-native conifers, leading to habitat degradation and carbon release. 80% of Ireland's raised bogs have disappeared as a result. Conservation efforts are now focused on protecting and restoring what remains of these vital ecosystems.

Projects aim to re-wet drained bogs, promote the growth of sphagnum mosses, and reduce peat extraction. 53 areas of raised bog have been designated Special Areas of Conservation, under Irish and European Union law. In some cases, land is being returned to its natural state by blocking drainage ditches and removing invasive species. These efforts are supported by both national policies and European Union initiatives aimed at protecting peatlands under the EU Habitats Directive.

Bord na Móna has ended all peat harvesting on its lands. It has changed its business model and is now focused on renewable energy production, such as wind and solar generation. However, manual turf cutting still continues in many areas of Ireland. According to the 2022 census, some 68,000 households across Ireland are mostly dependent on turf for home heating. Cultural and political change in this area will only be fostered through negotiation and agreement.

Irish boglands are ecologically invaluable landscapes, providing critical services such as biodiversity conservation, carbon sequestration, water regulation, and cultural preservation. Their role as carbon sinks makes them crucial in the fight against climate change, while their ability to regulate water flow and prevent floods highlights their importance in maintaining hydrological balance. As efforts to conserve and restore these ecosystems continue, it is essential to recognise the interconnectedness of bogs with Ireland's natural and cultural heritage, ensuring their protection for future generations.

Tim Leahy



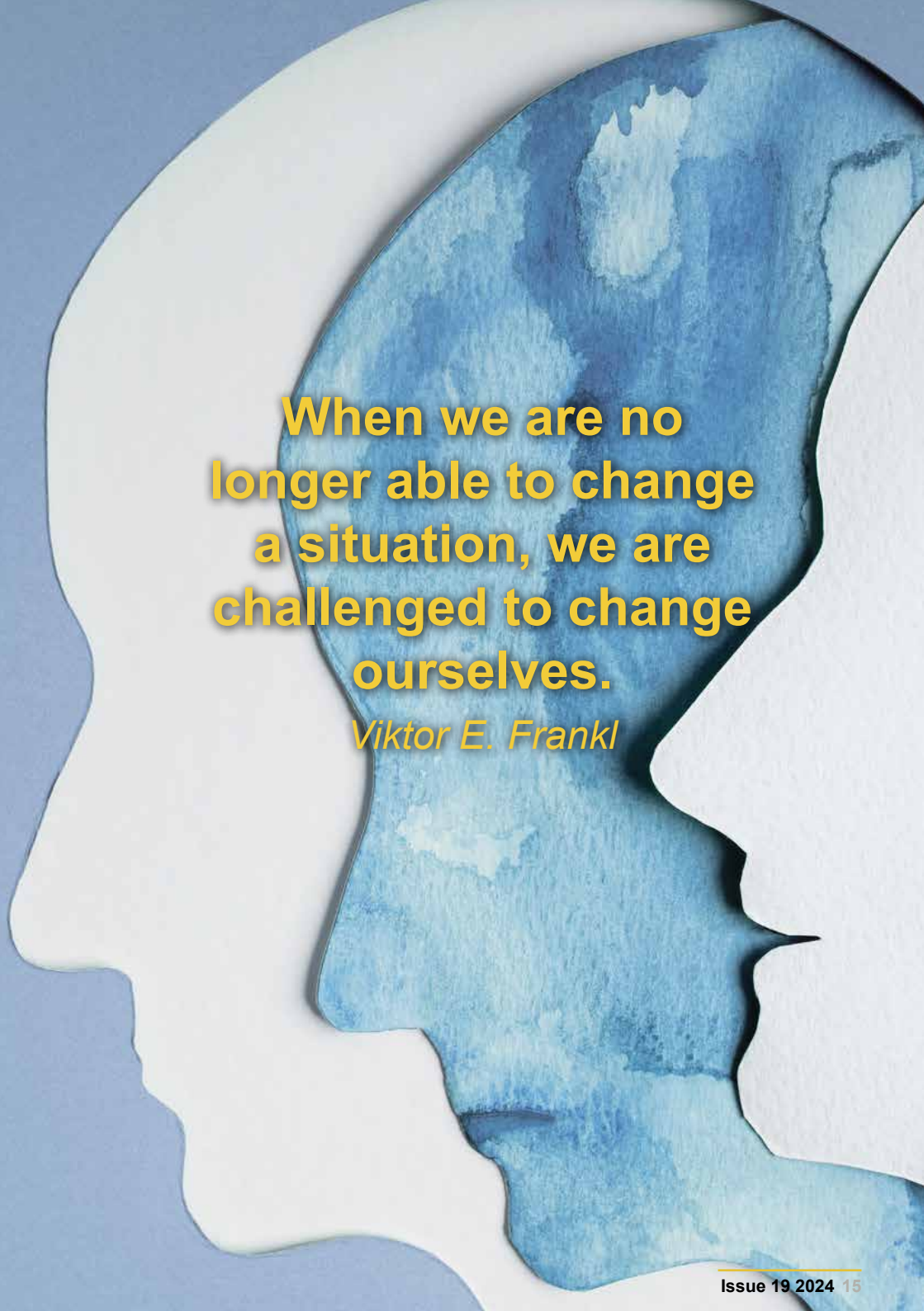
## Autumn Fires

In the other gardens  
And all up in the vale,  
From the autumn bonfires  
See the smoke trail!

Pleasant summer over,  
And all the summer flowers,  
The red fire blazes,  
The grey smoke towers.

Sing a song of seasons!  
Something bright in all!  
Flowers in the summer,  
Fires in the fall!

*Robert Louis Stevenson*



**When we are no  
longer able to change  
a situation, we are  
challenged to change  
ourselves.**

*Viktor E. Frankl*



# The Beauties of New Worlds

## *What an Octopus can teach us?*

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The documentary *My Octopus Teacher*, released in 2020 and available to watch on Netflix, was filmed in a kelp forest in the coast of South Africa. It is directed by Craig Foster, who is a South African documentary filmmaker, naturalist, and founder of the Sea Change Project.

You should not watch it only based on the 8.1 IMDb rating, or for having won an Academy award, the Oscars among other prizes, this is an extra incentive no doubt, but the main reason why is because it shows an astonishing beauty in the storytelling, in the soundtrack and in the way it was filmed that is truly a balsam to the soul, in which every scene is a pearl.

The documentary starts by sharing the story of Craig, who was feeling burned out and had lost his connection with nature, and with that, his passion for filming it. To regain meaning and purpose in his life, he moved to a place near the sea, where he grew up and had happy memories offrom it. When he dived in the sea near his house, he found a kelp forest where he spotted an unusual thing that caught his attention, something in a spherical shape, surrounded by shells. He kept observing it, until he found it was an octopus using the shells for camouflage. He was mesmerized by it and had the epiphany of accompanying that creature by diving every day in the same spot.

What can happen if you do something every day? By diving daily for almost a year,





he could capture the life of this octopus; her grace, her incredible intelligence, and how that mollusk could strategize, improve in tactics, remember many details, her ability to play, and most astonishingly, the bond that she made with him. His commitment and patience enabled the development of a friendship between the diver and the octopus.

Through the observation of the world around us, it is possible to perceive the beauty of it. Craig, driven by this idea, dove in a dangerous, scary and cold ocean every day to find out what he could learn from it, what that experience would offer him. This can inspire the easily share a thought that good things in life usually do not come easy, they require effort and being open to accept life as it is. He did not have any guarantees that he would achieve something, or that he would be able to rediscoverfind back his passion for filming, but he committed himself by being present. And by doing so, a whole new universe opened to him.

How many universes can we relate to? How many different perspectives do we see and appreciate in the world around us do we acknowledge? This movie broadens our vision to new beings, their intelligence, and their lives, we can grow a deep love and and by knowing something, we can actually respect for itrespect it. This film shows heightens our appreciation a sensitized view forto other creatures and to their environment and how we can train our perception to gaze at the special things that are happening right in front of our eyes.

Amanda Backes Kauer

A silhouette of a Buddha statue is centered in the frame, set against a dramatic sky at sunset or sunrise. The sky transitions from a deep blue at the bottom to a bright, hazy orange and yellow at the top, with soft, wispy clouds. The Buddha statue is shown from the back, with its characteristic flame-shaped topknot (ushnisha) and serene expression. The overall mood is contemplative and spiritual.

# To see and to experience

6 Orthodox Schools of Philosophy in India

India, rich in the diversity of its cultures and traditions, offers one of the best-preserved collections of historic texts, some dating as far as 1500 BC. These ancient writings serve as the backbone of some of the oldest philosophical schools of the world. Indian philosophy has played an instrumental role in understanding and shaping the history of philosophy and is distinguished by interweaving metaphysics, spirituality, science, a way of life and more.

Over time, various schools of philosophy have emerged across the Indian subcontinent. The oldest recognized schools of thoughts can be divided into 6 traditional schools and are often referred to as “Darsana” a Sanskrit word that comes from “Drish” meaning to see and to experience. Darsana itself translates to a perspective or a viewpoint. The 6 historic schools of Indian philosophy are called “sad-darsana” or six viewpoints of the Vedas. Another common classification is “astika” and “nastika”. The astika school of philosophy considers the Vedas as their foundational text, whereas the nastika does not. Some of the commonly known nastika schools of philosophy are - Jain, Buddhism etc. In this article we are going to focus on the sad-darsana or the six orthodox schools of philosophy, they can be grouped into 3 sections, Samkhya and Yoga, Mimamsa and Vedanta and Nyaya and Vaisheshika.

**Samkhya:** Dualistic Philosophy

**Origins:** 4th century BCE

**Primary Teacher:** Sage Kapila

**Key Texts:** Samkhya Karika attributed to Ishvara krishna

**Core Focus:** Interplay of two independent principles - Purusha (consciousness) and Prakriti (matter)

Samkhya or Sankhya comes from Sanskrit and means “relating to numbers” or “rational”. In a philosophical context, Samkhya means rational investigation. One of the oldest schools of dualistic philosophy, it was founded by Sage Kapila who is mentioned as the wise one in Indian scriptures and texts such as the Vedas and Mahabharata. Though not widely practiced in present times, Samkhya remains fundamental in understanding some of the present philosophical thoughts.

Samkhya regards the universe as consisting of 2 independent realities, Purusha(consciousness) and Prakriti(matter). The interactions between these two is what leads to the creation of the universe and all lives. Independently, these remain in a state of equilibrium. Purusha – the cosmic being or consciousness and is complete, unchanging, passive, and indestructible, it is neither produced nor can produce. Prakriti is known as the natural and original form of everything in existence and through the evolution of Prakriti everything evolves. It is ever-changing and dynamic and consists of 3 gunas or qualities - Sattva, Rajas, and Tamas.

**Sattva** represents harmony or balance.

**Rajas** is passion, action, but can also lead to restlessness.

**Tamas** is ignorance, inertia and decay but is also important for rest and rejuvenation.

Unmanifested, Prakriti is in a state of equilibrium with its 3 gunas. When Purusha and Prakriti come into contact, the balance of gunas is disturbed, initiating the creation of all universe. As we know Purusha is passive, its mere presence leads the gunas to be out of harmony, triggering the evolution of the physical world. Once set to motion, Prakriti manifests 23 tattvas or elements of human experience. This gradual process starts with the manifestation of Mahat (intellect). From Mahat, rises Ahamkara (ego), leading to the creation of the Manas (mind), the five sensory organs (eyes, ears, nose, tongue, skin), the five organs of action (speech, hands, feet, organs of excretion and procreation), the five subtle elements (touch, sound, form, taste, smell), and finally the five gross elements (earth, water, fire, air, and ether).

All Prakriti has these 3 gunas in different proportions at different times. The interplay of these gunas gives rise to character, nature, and progress in life. Understanding the gunas and their interplay can help one take relevant steps to attain the final quest of every being – Moksha or liberation.

### **Moksha:**

As per Samkya, Moksha is the natural and ultimate goal of every being.

*As the unconscious milk functions for the sake of nourishment of the calf, so the Prakriti functions for the sake of moksha of the spirit.*

—*Samkhya karika, Verse 57*

Samkhya explains that beings get trapped in the cycle of birth and death due to ignorance (Avidya) of its true nature. This ignorance leads to identification with Prakriti and its elements such as buddhi, manas leading to endless suffering. Liberation is achieved when Purusha identifies itself as not the body, mind, or ego, but the pure, unchanging consciousness. This realization leads to the ending of the cycle of rebirth and liberation (Moksha) from the material world. Moksha is described as a state where the sattva guna is predominant.

While Samkhya is not a widely practiced philosophy, it has deeply influenced other schools of thoughts such as Vedanta, Yoga and also Buddhism.

**Yoga:** Path to Self-Knowledge

**Origins:** 1st century BCE

**Primary Teacher:** Sage Patanjali

**Key Texts:** Yoga Sutra of Patanjali

**Core Focus:** Dualism of Purusha (consciousness) and Prakriti, pursuit of self-realisation through discipline.

Yoga is a Sanskrit word meaning “union”. Yoga philosophy is considered as a subset of Samkhya philosophy as it considers the duality of Purusha (consciousness) and Prakriti (matter). Purusha by nature is Sattva and is in perfect harmony whereas Prakriti by nature is Tamas and in constant chaos. They enter a state of imbalance due to the interactions of the innate tendencies or gunas. This in turn leads to formation of bondage between them. Yoga differentiates from the non-theistic Samkhya by the consideration of a deity or Isvara.

As with Samkhya, Yoga philosophy posits that the presence of the Purusha in the vicinity of Prakriti leads to an imbalance in gunas, this imbalance creates the intellect, ego, and conscious mind. The interplay of these three leads to the creation of chitta or the state of mind. The unrestricted development of chitta caused suffering and pain.

The main aim of a being is to attain liberation and the steps of how to achieve this are in the Yoga Sutras. An eightfold path (Ashtanga Yoga) can lead to breaking the endless cycle of suffering and attaining liberation. The eight limbs are:

### **Yamas (abstinences)**

The moral guidelines for ethical living chart out 5 Yamas - Ahimsa (non-violence), Satya (truthfulness), Asteya (non-stealing), Brahmacharya (celibacy, fidelity) and Aparigraha (non-avarice)

### **Niyamas (observances)**

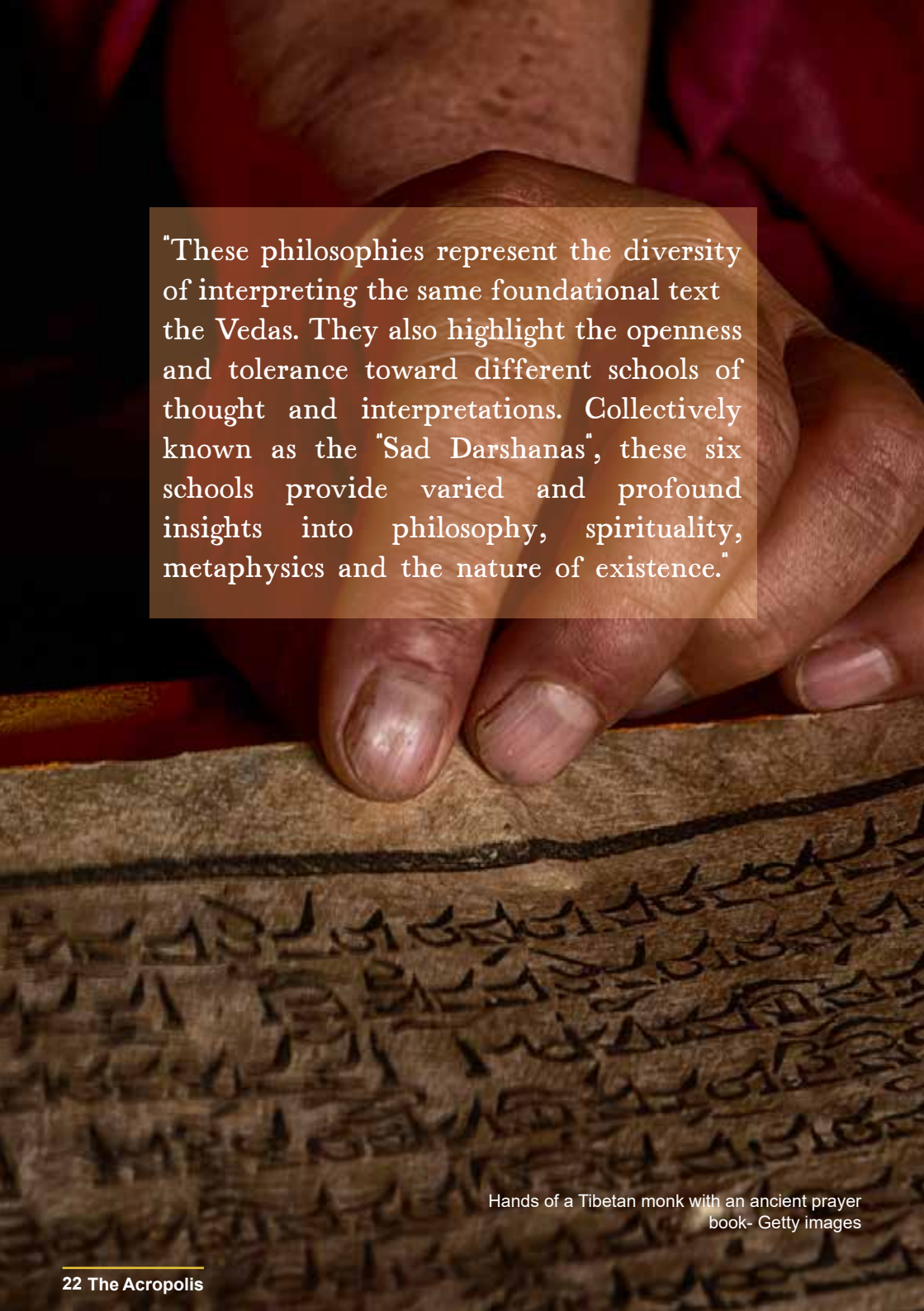
The virtuous habits and observances that help in self-development are – Shaucha (purity of body and mind), Santosha (contentment), Tapas (perseverance), Svadhyaya (study of Vedas and self) and Ishvarapranidhana (contemplation of the supreme being or god)

### **Asana (physical postures)**

A physical posture that you can keep for prolonged duration without the experience of unease and pain. While Yoga Sutra does not list any specific asana, some later commentaries suggest a few postures.

### **Pranayama (breath control)**

Stemming from the Sanskrit words, prana (breath) and ayama (restraint), pranayama is the conscious regulation of breath.



"These philosophies represent the diversity of interpreting the same foundational text the Vedas. They also highlight the openness and tolerance toward different schools of thought and interpretations. Collectively known as the "Sad Darshanas", these six schools provide varied and profound insights into philosophy, spirituality, metaphysics and the nature of existence."

Hands of a Tibetan monk with an ancient prayer book- Getty images

## Pratyahara (withdrawal)

Combination of Sanskrit prati (against) and ahara (bring near), pratyahara is to close one's mind to the sensory works and draw it inwards towards the self.

## Dharana (concertation)

To concentrate the mind towards any inner state and to hold and maintain it there without drifting and jumping to other topics.

## Dhayana (meditation)

Non-judgmental observation and reflection of the topic under Dharana.

## Samadhi (complete absorption or liberation)

Samadhi is the union with the conscience and hence attainment of liberation.

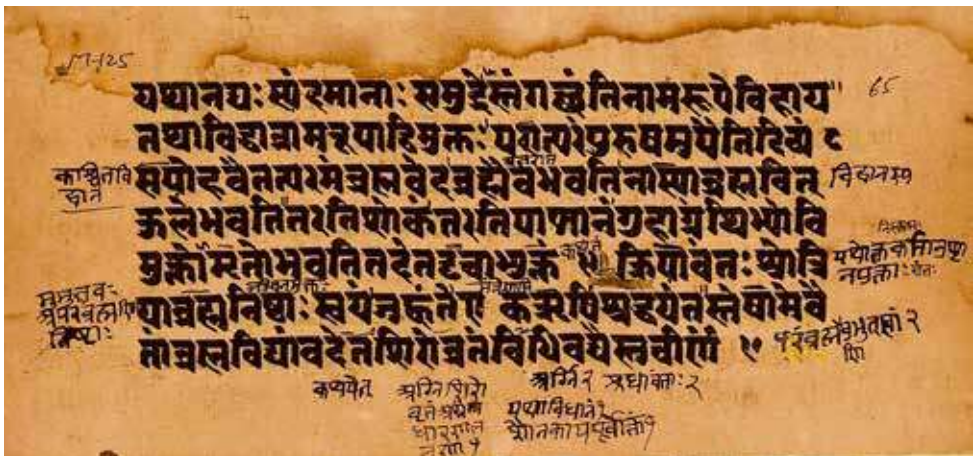
These eight limbs form a sequence of outer to inner with the final aim being liberation.

Yoga's focus on mental discipline, meditation, and physical health has made it one of the most widely practiced and popular systems of Indian philosophy worldwide. It offers a practical approach to achieving harmony between body, mind, and spirit.

Beautifully summed up below:

*Only when Manas (mind) with thoughts and the five senses stand still, and when Buddhi (intellect, power to reason) does not waver, that they call the highest path. That is what one calls Yoga, the stillness of the senses, concentration of the mind, It is not thoughtless heedless sluggishness, Yoga is creation and dissolution.*

—Katha Upanishad, 2.6.10–11



Mundaka Upanishad, verses -The early Upanishads (Upanisad, Upanisat) are scriptures of Hinduism. Dated by scholars to have been composed between 900 BCE to about 200 BCE

## Mimamsa – Philosophy of Ritual Action

**Origins:** 4th century BCE

**Primary Teacher:** Sage Jaimini

**Key Texts:** Mimamsa sutras

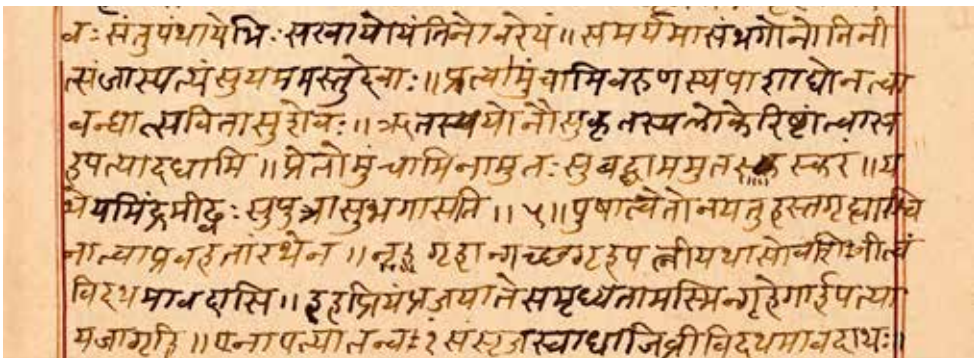
**Core Focus:** Interpretation of the Vedas, especially the ritualistic aspects, and the role of dharma (social duty)

Mimamsa, a Sanskrit word, means profound thought and investigation, which in the philosophical context means examination of the Vedic text. Mimamsa or Purva Mimamsa places the importance on the early sections of the Vedic Texts that focused on mantras and rituals. Jaimini, an ancient Indian sage, is credited with founding the Mimamsa school of philosophy. He is the disciple of sage Vyasa, who is the author of the Mahabharata. He is also the author of the Mimamsa sutras, which provides rules for the interpretation of the Vedas and the significance of observing Vedic rituals.

Both theistic and non-theistic in nature, Mimamsa does not focus on determining the concept of God. Unlike the other schools of orthodox philosophy, Mimamsa teaches that every being strives to find unending pleasure and joy in this life and next. This joy can be derived by closely following ancient practices and principles. As Vedas are infallible and contain the ultimate truth that can lead to highest good, Mimamsa's core concern is an epistemological method which tries to form a reliable means of interpreting the Vedas.

### Vedic Supremacy:

In Mimamsa philosophy, Vedas are termed Apaurusheya or not of human origin. The words in Vedas have existed since the beginning of time and observing the rituals - sacred ceremonies involving offerings, chants and prayers to invoke divine forces, as defined in the Vedas is the ultimate truth. There is no requirement of a god to validate these rituals. The Vedas are not to be interpreted word by word but by sentences to get the correct interpretation.



Mandala 10, Hymn 85, of a northern recension of the Rigveda manuscript. It shows the Vivaha sukta, the celebrated hymn that continues to be in use for Hindu weddings.



**Epistemology:**

As correct interpretation of text is of utmost importance, Mimamsa recognizes six means of acquiring valid knowledge. Pratyaksha (perception) both internal and external, Anumana (Inference) reaching a conclusion from the observances, Upamana (comparison and analogy) as conditional knowledge, Arthapatti (postulation) extrapolations derived from circumstances, Anupalabधि (non-perception) negative proof leading to a conclusion and Shabda (relying on word) of a reliable spoken or written form.

**Dharma:**

Dharma or ethical/moral actions is the center focus of Mimamsa and are the duties and ethical obligations required for living a good life. Dharma can be understood and practiced by proper study of the Vedas and following the rituals.

Mimamsa, along with its importance of the Vedas and ritualistic practices, plays an important role not only in Indian philosophy, but also Indian religion.

**Vadanta (Uttara Mimamsa): Philosophy of Absolute Reality**

**Origins:** 1st century BCE

**Primary Teachers:** Various, including Badarayana (author of the Brahma Sutras), Adi Shankaracharya, Ramanuja, and Madhvacharya.

**Key Texts:** Upanishads, Brahma Sutras, Bhagavad Gita

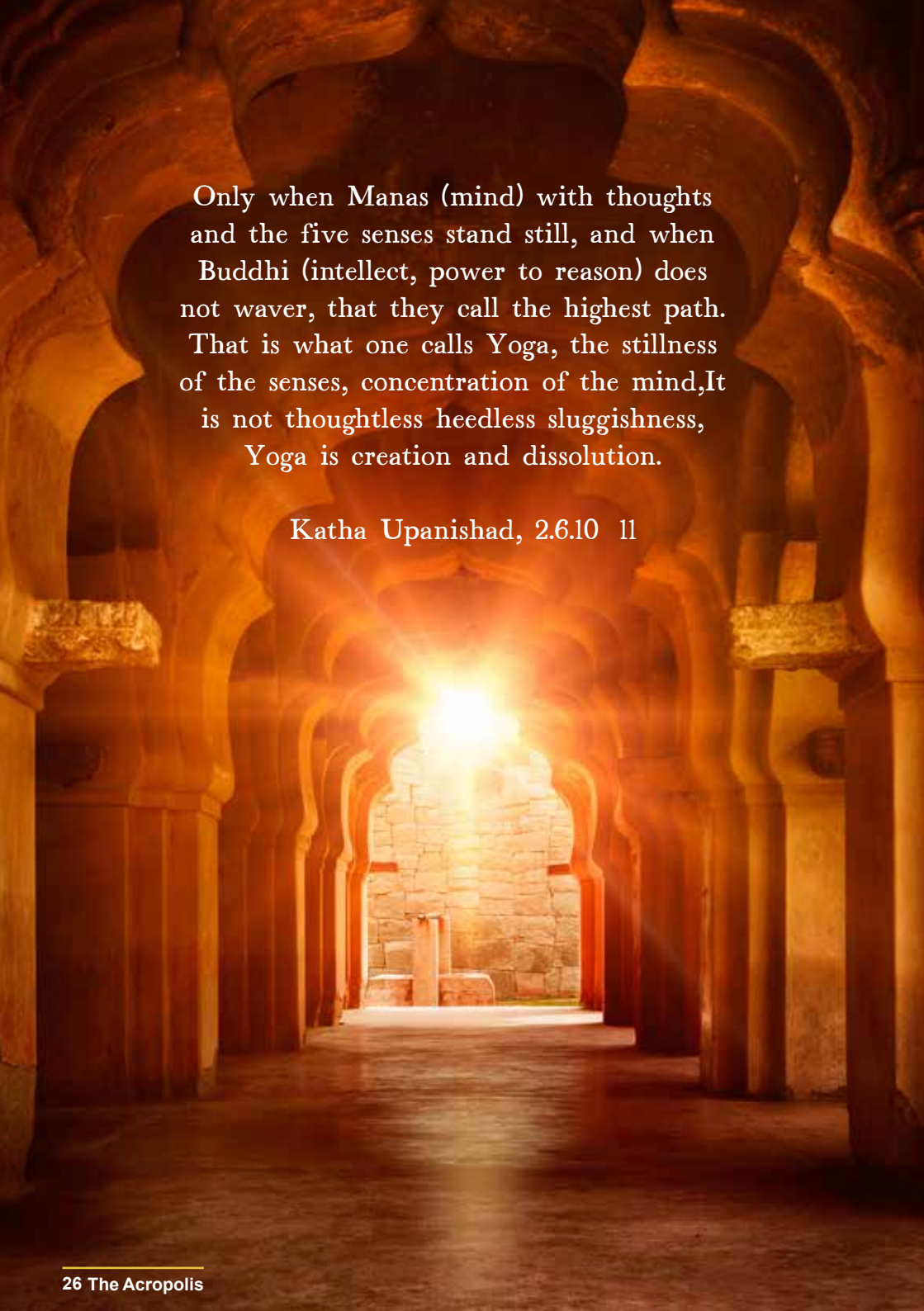
**Core Focus:** The inter-relationship between metaphysical categories - Atman (individual soul), Brahman(ultimate reality) and Prakriti (empirical world)

Like Mimamsa, Vedanta also stems from the interpretation of the Vedas. The word Vedanta can be broken into Veda – sacred Vedic texts and Anta – end, meaning conclusion of Vedas, and thus it differs from Mimamsa by focusing on the later Vedic Texts, The Upanishads, Brahma Sutra, and Bhagavad Gita. Also referred to as Uttara Mimamsa or higher/latter enquiry, Vedanta depicts the pinnacle of Vedic Philosophy. Various interpretations of these texts have given rise to different branches of Vedanta.

Most schools of Vedanta focus on devotion to a deity, mainly Vishnu and his forms. According to Vedanta, scriptures are the primary way of knowing and understanding complex spiritual matters. Out of the 6 schools of philosophy, Vedanta is the most well-known and practiced, both in India and abroad. Vedanta speaks of the relationship of the soul or Atman with the supreme god, the Brahman.

**Atman:** Sanskrit word for true or eternal self, that is unchanging and imperishable. Bhagavad Gita explains Atman as eternal and unaffected by the cycle of birth and death, it is neither born nor can be killed. Ultimately, Atman is identical to the Brahman.

**Brahman:** The ultimate reality and the source of the foundation of the universe and all its life. It is unchanging while being the cause of all change.

A long, dimly lit corridor with a series of arches leading to a bright light at the end. The arches are made of stone and are supported by pillars. The light at the end of the corridor is very bright, creating a strong contrast with the dark interior. The overall atmosphere is one of mystery and depth.

Only when Manas (mind) with thoughts  
and the five senses stand still, and when  
Buddhi (intellect, power to reason) does  
not waver, that they call the highest path.  
That is what one calls Yoga, the stillness  
of the senses, concentration of the mind,It  
is not thoughtless heedless sluggishness,  
Yoga is creation and dissolution.

Katha Upanishad, 2.6.10 11

While all Vedanta schools hold Atman and Brahman as the central concept, they treat their inter-relationships differently, based on whether they believe in dualism or non-dualism. Some of the major schools are:

**Advaita Vedanta:** Founded by Adi Shankaracharya in the 8th century CE, Advaita, meaning non-dualism, treats the Atman and Brahman to be identical. Brahman is the unchanging, universal reality, akin to the individual Atman, Maya or illusion is what leads to the apparent duality in the physical world. Liberation is achieved with the realisation “Tat Tvam Asi” You are that – meaning the atman is one with the brahman.

**Vishishtadvaita:** Meaning qualified non-dualism, Vishishtadvaita asserts that while the atman and brahman are different, there is fundamental unity between them. Atman has the potential to unite with Brahman and devotion to god (Vishnu) as the means to liberation.

**Dvaita Vedanta:** Founded by Madhavacharya, Dvaita means dualism, and considers the atman and Brahman as completely different entities. According to Dvaita, Brahman is the creator and governor of the universe and is perfect and complete, the jivatman is subject to desires and is influenced by karma. Liberation can be attained by devotion to Vishnu (Brahman) but is affected by karma.

**Nyaya:** Philosophy of Logic and Reasoning

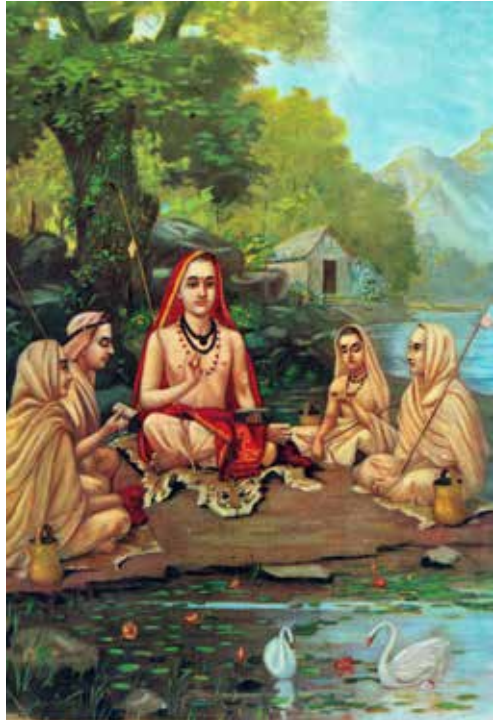
**Origins:** 2nd century BCE

**Primary Teacher:** Sage Gautama

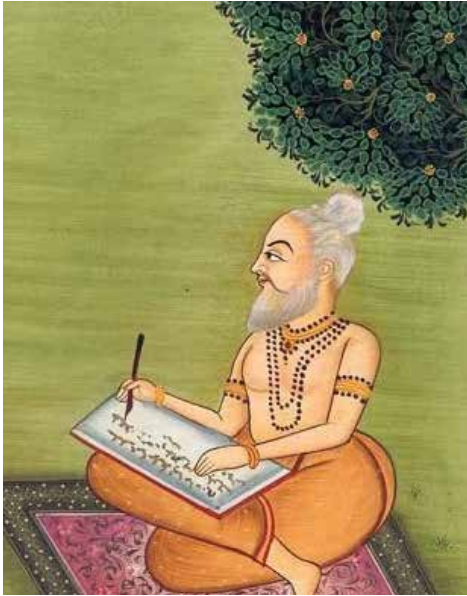
**Key Texts:** Nyaya Sutras

**Core Focus:** Development of the theory of logic and reasoning

Nyaya translates to “justice” or “universal laws” in Sanskrit and is known for its contribution to the development of theory of knowledge, reasoning and epistemology. Suffering, according to Nyaya, is due to actions taken on the basis of incorrect knowledge and liberation can be attained through right knowledge. Incorrect knowledge not only leads to ignorance but also to delusions and wrong



Adi Shankara, the most prominent exponent of Advaita Vedānta tradition. - wikimedia



Mīmāṃsā – Interpretation of Sacred Texts  
-philosophy.redzambala.com

doings. Like Mimamsa, Nyaya focuses on the importance of Pramana, reliable means of acquiring knowledge and holds important 4 out of the 6 pramanas -

**Pratyaksha (Perception):** Perception is considered foremost in Nyaya philosophy, perception is based on direct experience of reality by the senses and not via hearsay. This in turn can be immediate or observed.

**Anumana (Inference):** Anumana is based on logical reasoning and deductions based on observation. Inference can be for oneself and for others, when for others, it must follow 5 steps of the Theory of Inference. It can be further divided into: Purvavat – inference based on previous experience; Sheshavat – inference based on effect and cause; Samanyato drishta – inference

based on common characteristics.

**Upaman (Comparision and analogy):** This is the knowledge gained by comparing something unknown with something known.

**Shabda (Verbal Testimony):** Knowledge gained by trustworthy sources such as vedas or learned individuals.

Nyaya is a highly rational and analytical system that has given rise to the development of theory of knowledge which now forms the basis of the Indian education system. While Nyaya recognizes the authority of scriptures and a deity (in some recent additions), the main importance is given to reasoning and logical examination. Liberation in Nyaya is achieved through true knowledge.

**Vaisheshika:** Philosophy of Metaphysics

**Origins:** 2nd century BCE

**Primary Teacher:** Sage Kanada

**Key Texts:** Vaisheshika Sutras

**Core Focus:** Metaphysics and Atomism

While similar to the Nyaya school, Vaisheshika focuses primarily on metaphysics, particularly the atomistic nature of the universe. It postulates that the universe is a combination of paramanu (atoms) which are indivisible and indestructible. The

atoms combine in different ways to create the physical world, and destruction occurs when these connections break. Vaisheshika accepts only two reliable means to knowledge - Pratyaksha(perception) and anumana(inference). It also considers that all things that exist can be divided into seven padarthas(categories), one added at a later stage. The padarthas are:

**Dravya (substance):** there are 9 foundational substances pṛthvī (earth), ap (water), tejas (fire), vāyu (air), ākaśa (ether), kāla (time), dik (space), ātman (self or soul) and manas (mind).

**Guna (quality):** The quality inherent in the substances, there are in total 24 qualities, 7 added at a later stage and include colour, smell, touch, fluidity, desire, pain, knowledge etc.

**Karma (activity):** These are the actions or movements of the substances, but unlike Guna, they are more transient in nature.

**Samanya (generality):** These are the general qualities that are universal and common between many substances e.g., human behaviour would be common in all humans.

**Vishesha (particularity):** This is the unique characteristic of a substance that makes it different from the others.

**Samavaya (inherence):** This is the inherent relationship between substances that are inseparable, a relationship of cause and effect, like a relationship between the ingredients and a completed dish.

**Abhava (non-existence):** Added at a later time, abhava is the absence or non-existence of a substance.

In its earlier stages, Vaisheshika developed as an independent school of philosophy with the main concern being metaphysics, overtime it got closer to Nyaya in terms of its procedures and conclusions. According to Vaisheshika, only through a complete understanding of the world can we attain liberation.

These philosophies represent the diversity of interpreting the same foundational text—the Vedas. They also highlight the openness and tolerance toward different schools of thought and interpretations. Collectively known as the "Sad Darshanas", these six schools provide varied and profound insights into philosophy, spirituality, metaphysics and the nature of existence. They have deeply influenced not only Indian thoughts and traditions but also global spiritual and philosophical discussions.

Shivangi Upadhyaya

# Mastering the bow



image - gettyimages.ie

*First establish being in yourself, and only then perform action.*

**- Yogastha Kuru Karmani**

## **Introduction**

Amidst a series of mystical verses compiled in the Bhagavad Gita, this is one of the fundamental instructions that Krishna transmits to a distraught Arjuna, when faced with the prospect of killing his own cousins in the battlefield of Kurukshetra, in order to reinstate dharma in the kingdom.

The philosophical tradition suggests that beneath this storyline lies a deeper dimension, revealed only to one who knows to unravel its mysteries, by turning inwards, to the inner Kurukshetra, within the human being. Captured within the elaborate mythology is a fundamental truth about the human condition, characterised by an inner battle between the Kauravas (the innumerable human vices, and the cause of ignorance) and the Pandavas (the divine potential), between non-truth and Truth.

In order to manoeuvre through this inner battlefield, the protagonist Arjuna serves as a symbol of a human hero – a mighty warrior accomplished specifically as a legendary archer. Hence, when the same tradition offers a dedicated volume on the art and science of archery, it certainly warrants a deeper look, for anyone seeking to “establish being in yourself”, as an elementary step in the preparation to charge into the inner battle.

## **Dhanurveda**

The word Dhanurveda literally translates as “Knowledge of the Bow”. It is considered a supportive text that supplements the Yajur Veda (Book of Ritual), one of the 4 primary canons of Vedic Literature. At first glance it appears to be a technical treatise documenting the ancient science and practice of archery. It elaborately details various kinds of bows, arrows, targets, postures, and various usages of each, and even includes recommendations on auspicious moments to commence the study of archery. Pupils are given a well-rounded holistic training, so that they are equipped to respond to all situations.

However, to reduce Dhanurveda to a simple catalogue of weapons and battle strategies would be a mistake. Like in any practice, it is easy to imagine that the discipline and practice required in archery training facilitates the development of the human being, physically and mentally. Although this by itself is an audacious work, when considered in the context of the Vedic tradition, it seems that even this difficult work is akin to the preparation of a well-formed vessel; it is ultimately meant to be used to carry something of value; in this case, a purified human consciousness.

## Forming the Vessel

Dr. John Douillard, author and scholar of Yoga and Ayurveda, says, “When you fully draw a bow back in an attempt to shoot an arrow...You must hold and establish that arrow and bowstring into a state of absolute stillness or silence. The slightest movement of the bowstring will create an exponentially distorted flight of the arrow.”

It must be noted that it is not enough to understand this. It demands actual practice and perseverance, because generally the mind is reactive, calculating, ever-busy attached to the past, anticipating the future, and rarely in one’s own control. We might describe it as concentration, or as an ability to dispel distractions caused by attachments. Douillard explains, “The minute we let the mind wander, be distracted or think about the outcome, the mind instantly attaches itself to the fruits of that action. The mind will seek the reward, the satisfaction of hitting the target, the return on investment...every action becomes a manipulation of the environment to deliver a reward.”

And so in the practice of wielding the bow, the pupil begins to transform himself, with self-control, concentration, and inner stability. The motivation of each action is gradually purified, such that it emerges not from attachment, fear or anticipation, but from stillness. It is from this meditative state of “establishing being” that the archer is able to perform right action, the release of his arrow. This is perhaps the most important part of meditation, often neglected in our times – the imperative to act. Such right action becomes the reward in itself.





## Inner Archery

One might turn to the Manduka Upanishad to reveal more clearly the larger goal, a spiritual purpose, of this solitary practice.

*"dhanur grhītvā aupaniṣadam mahāstraṁ śaraṁ hy upāsā-nīṣitaṁ saṁdadhīta, āyamyā tad-bhāvagatena cetasā lakṣyaṁ tad evākṣaraṁ, saumya viddhi.*

*praṇavo dhanuḥ, śaro hy ātmā, brahma tal lakṣyam ucyate, apramattena veddhavyam, śaravat tanmayo bhavet."*

*Take up the mighty bow of the Upanishad, place upon it an arrow [Mind], sharpened and straightened,*

*Draw back the bow string, mind suffused in Brahman, the goal, let fly and pierce [know] it unerringly.*

*The practice is the Bow, you are the Arrow, Brahman [Truth] is your target,*

*Hit it unerringly, become one with it.*

We find therefore, that ultimately the human tradition has unceasingly whispered through the ages, the need to cross the distance of ignorance, by acquiring living knowledge, an inner realization that results from experience. The mastery of archery, and the system described in the Dhanurveda, can serve as a symbolic and formative practice, to "establish being in yourself", transcending the transient masks, in order to facilitate this transformation.

Hariato Mehta

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