

JUL - SEP 2016

# THE ACROPOLITAN

A Magazine on Philosophy, Culture & Volunteering



**FEATURE**

## THE THEORY OF REINCARNATION

PURSUIT OF WORK-LIFE BALANCE

THE MOZART EFFECT

PADMA SHRI ANU AGA  
ON SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

SCHEDULE OF PUBLIC EVENTS

  
NEW ACROPOLIS

# THE ACROPOLITAN

In Ancient Greece, the Acropolis referred to the sacred centre, that lay higher than the rest of the city. It was a place of inspiration; a bridge that enabled citizens to connect to the divine, evoking the expression of the higher human virtues. Deriving inspiration from its purpose, The Acropolitan Magazine serves as a tribute to every citizen yearning for these higher principles in all aspects of Life: **Truth, Beauty, Justice, Goodness.**



## FROM THE EDITORIAL DESK

Dear Reader,

It is evident that ancient wisdom recognized the power of philosophy as a practical means by which to nurture meaning and fulfillment in life. In countless traditions, it was the axis around which education was imparted, so as to foster the tools that might enable citizens to give expression to the best of their potential, and help each individual to develop an attitude of wonder at the magical unity that permeates all realms of Life.

For an aspiring philosopher therefore, philosophy was not a hobby, nor intellectual stimulation. It was never intended to be a theoretical or academic faculty, lacking relevance or application in life. Instead, it was the art of living – integrated into every aspect of life, all the time, everywhere – a state of being. Through it, a businessman, treading the thin line of balance between his personal and professional obligations might find lasting solutions. It might motivate corporate leaders to re-consider their social responsibilities. And in its practice, an athlete might find the will to develop discipline, perseverance and excellence.

Might we dare to take responsibility, and improve the human condition through a philosophical revolution...to seize our freedom, our immortality, and break the materialistic shackles of illusion? Lets each, do his/her own little bit.

**The Editorial Team**



**PHILOSOPHY** when practical, helps us to know and improve ourselves. It is a way of life, not an intellectual attitude, committed to the best aspirations of humanity.



**CULTURE** broadens our understanding of life, and fosters a spirit of mutual respect and solidarity, strengthening human dignity and facilitating harmonious coexistence.



**VOLUNTEERING** is the natural expression of a spirit of union with life and humanity, which manifests in the practice of values such as unselfishness, commitment and striving for the common good.

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# THE PURSUIT OF A WORK-LIFE BALANCE

BY RAHIL MEHTA



**Human** Beings have a natural need to improve and grow. Certain moments in our lives are decisive where we feel we made a breakthrough and in hindsight we may recognize the inspiration and experiences that guided us in those moments. Often we find that in such moments we are more goal-oriented and focussed, thereby able to make accurate decisions and push our boundaries, e.g. a sleepless night spent by an entrepreneur to execute his first sale is driven by his goal to be financially successful.

Yet for many there is a palpable dissatisfaction; both among those that steadily succeed and those who are less successful. The rigmarole of work and career often dampens success, small and big, exposing its transient nature. With the passage of time, achievements become passé leaving us craving for more, resulting in burnout, anxiety, strained relationships and a lack of self-confidence.

A "Work-Life Balance" is popularly touted as a magical remedy for this ailment. It is common to hear that an easier job, or working in a particular industry, is a route to a better Work-Life Balance. Organizations even have Work-Life Balance

Programs as part of employee satisfaction initiatives. But perhaps by this **we run the danger of superficiality; passing over a real opportunity to find a lasting solution, and uncover a secret of life.** It may be easier to answer this question by first exploring the meaning of a Work-Life Balance; to do this lets break it down into its components.

**The rigmarole of work and career often dampens success, small and big, exposing its transient nature.**

Man has the propensity to act, but we often fail to appreciate the depth of our ability to act. Philosophers through the ages have prompted us to "know ourselves" better, so that we can bring more meaning into our actions. The sum total of these actions can be understood as "**Work**"; that which we do towards a goal, be it for work and money, to relax or even to have a conversation. We act in our relationships, we act to travel and learn about the

world. We also act when we question life and its many mysteries.

But what is the difference between the different kinds of work that we do? If we introspect we may be able to easily see that anything we do is a complex coordination of our thoughts, our emotions, our energy and our body. A simple example is the act of writing; we have in our mind something we want to express on paper, requiring that we combine our thoughts and our actions to pick up a pen and guide it to write words that represent our thought.

**Man has the propensity to act, but we often fail to appreciate the depth of our ability to act.**

To understand this better think of the difference between when we do something driven by our passion, versus when we do the same thing because we are forced to do it. The physical action is the same but the thought, the feeling, and as a result, the energy will probably be quite different.

It is uncommon to look at our actions and our work from this broad perspective. We may simply define work as that which we do to make money. And we blame that work for the lack of balance in our lives!

*"Never get so busy making a living that you forget to make a life."*

Many cultures of antiquity recognize that **"Life"** exists all around us. What is this life? Observe life in the magic of nature! We can see the magic in the caterpillar that turns into a butterfly, a bud that blossoms into a flower, the lofty mountains, the vast ocean and the sun that rises and sets without fail every day.

To recognize life is also to know that all our work (our actions) have an impact on our environment. Every action is much more than we imagine. Our connection with life means that our environment influences us; but it also means that we have an influence on our environment, often in ways that we may not see.



We have the intelligence to bring vibrancy and depth to our actions and in turn to our environment. We have the ability to choose to bring about change rather than complain about our problems, to rise above them till they become challenges to vanquish and opportunities to grow. This is to say, we have the ability to breathe life into our work.

Life has such richness that we can't possibly grasp it entirely. Every moment is a new opportunity to connect with life. Philosophers through the ages have pointed out to us something that is happening right under our noses – that life is vibrant and ever changing. Hence, the job that seemed like a gift last year may today seem like a chore. Just because we recognize that our work and life are aligned today, it is not necessary that it will remain so tomorrow.

All we have to do is grasp a simple concept: as we live more, our work will naturally change since we will learn to do more and better. Accordingly we will invite new opportunities and challenges which we must embrace with the correct attitude.

When first we see new obstacles, they will overwhelm us. But when we centre ourselves, remind ourselves that this is another opportunity in the journey of life and remember our potential to breathe life into our work, these obstacles can become steps to our growth and improvement as human beings.

The need to always adjust ourselves to our new challenges is the "**Balance**". Emerson emphasized, "Life is a journey, not a destination." To balance is to live life to the fullest, always approaching our challenges with the attitude of growth. Wise men that uncovered man's true potential have left us guidance on how to maintain this balance, based on their own investigation.

**Our connection with life means that our environment influences us; but it also means that we have an influence on our environment, often in ways that we may not see.**

In India, this balance, or correct measure, is described in the understanding of the three gunas: *rajas*, *tamas*, and *sattva*. *Rajas* is one extreme wherein action is driven by individual passion, which may be motivated by egoism and self-centeredness. *Tamas* on the other hand is inaction, inertia and lethargy which reflect a state of chaos and disorder. *Sattva*, however, is the balanced state. It is NOT the combination of *rajas* and *tamas*. It is the balance, the right alignment that helps us avoid the extremes. This is characterised by the ability to create with harmony.

In order to develop this harmony, the Buddha prescribes the 8 fold path. He advocates the development of Right Views and Right Goals, and living them with Right Speech and Right Action. As we make the Right Effort, we develop mindfulness and Right Concentration, which in turn invites us to sharpen our goals to take into account the experience we have gained on our journey of walking the path so far. This gives impetus to a new iteration of the 8-fold path; now with more refined goals and a better connection with life.



To maintain "Work-Life Balance" is each one's responsibility and every human being has a natural yearning for it. There may be a fear of stepping out of our comfort zone or a sense of confusion of what lies beyond. But if we open our eyes to the reality around us, we will see the indelible writing on the wall - "**TAKE OWNERSHIP – It's your life!**"

*"I'm not afraid of storms, for I'm learning how to sail my ship."* -Louisa May Alcott

We can't be afraid to take responsibility for what is missing in our lives. For only when we become the drivers of our lives, can we take credit for what we achieve and bravely take the steps to where we have never been before! ★★★



# THE MOZART EFFECT

BY DAVID HIRSCHORN

*"Thus, then, excellence of form and content in discourse and of musical expression and rhythm, and grace of form and movement, all depend on goodness of nature, by which I mean, not the foolish simplicity sometimes called by courtesy good nature, but a nature in which goodness of character has been well and truly established." - The Republic, Plato*

**Recently,** in the United States, the Governor of Georgia asked the state legislature to pass a law requiring that a classical CD be sent to every new mother. Although this bill did not pass, it received a great deal of attention. The unusual request was prompted by exciting new research in the fields of neuroscience and cognitive science regarding the effects of classical music on intelligence and learning.

"It is well known that music facilitates language development, enhances creativity and expression in children," says Dr. Frances H. Rauscher, of the Center for the Neurobiology of Learning and Memory. Dr. Rauscher has conducted some of the most innovative research in what several writers have termed "The Mozart Effect." Extensive research on the biological roots of music have resulted in the

following conclusions:

1. Music is universal. Studies on the effects of classical music and intelligence have produced the same favorable results in a variety of cultures.
2. Musical behaviors emerge in infancy. Children begin singing very early in life, often earlier than speech development.
3. Teaching children to play music exercises the brain, the sensory and perceptual system, and the cognitive system.
4. A strong music curriculum improves reading comprehension. This research studied students involved in the Kodaly music curriculum. The students were tested and showed an increase in reading comprehension scores.
5. Dramatic long lasting effects of music and intelligence are more pronounced when there is instruction in music. There is not a strong case that casual listening has the same effect as instruction in music. However, a study was conducted in which college students scored eight to nine points higher on a spatial IQ test after listening to Mozart's "Sonata for Two Pianos in D Major" (K. 448). (6)
6. Rauscher's most well-known study involved 34 preschool children who were given piano training for a period of six months. After the six months,



the children could play a few basic melodies of Mozart and Beethoven. They exhibited a 36 percent increase in spatial IQ tests.

7. This last study received widespread media coverage. Soon after, music stores began selling out of Mozart CDs, parents began enrolling their children in piano classes and countless schools and educators began playing Mozart during instructional and study time. The "Mozart Effect", was labeled as such by doctors and scientists and resulted in the popular book of Don Campbell entitled: *The Mozart Effect: Tapping the Power of Music to Heal the Body, Strengthen the Mind, and Unlock the Creative Spirit*.

Campbell cites several studies on the effects of music on the unborn child. The most important sound the fetus hears is its mother's voice. For this reason, it is recommended that the mother read to her unborn child. Studies on baby birds show that birds that are hatched by foster parents will not sing or imitate the sounds of the foster bird-parents that hatched them, only those of their natural parents.



Rock music has been shown to drive the fetus to excessive kicking and even violent movements when played to the unborn. In contrast, Mozart and Vivaldi are most pleasing to the child, particularly the violin concertos of Mozart. In traditional

Japanese culture, embryonic education is nothing new. Called "Tai-Kwo", it is a philosophy which calls for the education of the child to start very early in a pregnancy.

If it is true that music can indeed heal the body as Don Campbell asserts or strengthen the mind as Dr. Rauscher declares, how is it possible to measure its ability to unlock the creative spirit? If music instruction can improve intelligence, what about other aspects of human life, such as character, virtue, and the development of human sentiments? Can music help make us moral? Can music help an individual to form a strong, value-based character, reminiscent of Plato's ideal in *The Republic*?

**According to Plato, musical training is inseparably linked to character formation, and should not be considered an island unto its own.**

For Plato, the measure of music's greatness is in its ethos, its moral character, its ability to inspire virtue, effecting a moral "paideia" in the individual. The Greek term "paideia" is defined by classicist Werner Jaegar as the formation of the Greek Character. Jaegar uses the Greek term in his writings for "it is seen with the eyes, not of modern men, but of the Greeks." (3) According to Plato, musical training is inseparably linked to character formation, and should not be considered an island unto its own. Classical Greek education was based on the premise that the outer and inner man can achieve a level of virtue, of "areté", when high standards of selection, noble self-expression, honor and discipline take precedence over the superfluous and fleeting thoughts, emotions and actions.

The Greek word music, which defines both music proper and poetry, was fundamental to Greek education, not simply for its utilitarian function, i.e.

reading, writing and memorization of epic poems, but for its profound effects on the human soul. "The decisive importance of education in poetry and music: rhythm and harmony sink deep into the recesses of the soul and take the strongest hold there, bringing grace of body and mind which is only to be found in one who is brought up in the right way." (5)

***Jung reminds us that personality comes from the word persona which was the mask worn by actors of antiquity. Individuation is a process of identifying oneself with what lies behind the mask and this is for Jung, a spiritual journey.***

Carl Jung became aware that all therapy should involve some element of music, because music was one of the only forms of communication which could allow, comprehend and release archetypes. Jung used music at the symbolic/mythical level where "universal" concepts of the human being are awakened. (1)

Some of the most fascinating theories of character formation are offered by Jung. He considered personality to be an achievement, not something given. Character Formation is a continual process towards wholeness, towards what Jung would call the "process of individuation." Jung wrote a great deal about alchemy, i.e. the transformation of the "personality" into the "individual". (7)

Jung reminds us that personality comes from the word persona which was the mask worn by actors of antiquity. Individuation is a process of identifying oneself with what lies behind the mask and this is for Jung, a spiritual journey. The path is one of

integration, which results in an identification with the Self, a unified persona, instead of a persona entangled in chaos. (7)



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Plato's concept of the individual is almost identical to Jung's concept. For Plato, the primary aim of musical training was to produce a recognition of the Beautiful in the individual. (3) Thus by establishing beauty and concord in the Soul, one would learn to recognize beauty and harmony when seen outside the Self.

If Plato were alive today, he would very likely be interested in Dr. Rauscher's research on music and intelligence. But, he would probably assert that, even more important than music's ability to improve scores on a spatial I.Q. test is its capacity to establish nobility and grace of character in a human being, awakening the eternal ideals of Goodness, Beauty and Justice. ★★★

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# THE PHILOSOPHICAL MEANING OF THE THEORY OF REINCARNATION

BY PIERRE POULAIN

In most ancient civilizations – like in an important number of faiths – we find the idea of reincarnation, the process that follows physical death. Modern occidental cultures consider death as the opposite of life, and in logical consequence reject death. Death is considered an aim, a disaster, and today most of us are afraid of death. In ancient times, and with another education, death was considered to be part of the natural cycle of life, a necessary process about which we need to learn, and not be afraid of.

Ancient Tibetan wisdom says that there is nothing more important in life than learning how to die well. This means that the time of our life can be used to prepare for the next stage...just as the time of death is, in a way, preparation for the next life.

Of course, this never meant that people looked for death; on the contrary, seeking death, like when performing a suicide, has always been considered disrespectful of the Cycle of Life and is a heavy fault, as we shall see later below. Preparing for death is to give signification to our life. But to fully understand the logic of the reincarnation process, we must first consider the following 4 concepts which are part of the traditional way of thinking, without which the logic of the reincarnation idea cannot be perceived.

## The Basic Concepts:

### I - There is an aim to evolution: the return to Unity.

Just like the physical cosmos was born from the Big Bang, the explosion of the primordial unity into a multitude of fragments, it is considered that the explosion of a primordial "Ocean", the consciousness of divinity, gave birth to a limited, but very large number of "drops"...souls. And just like modern physics theories hold, after its expansion, the cosmos will enter a phase of concentration until it again reaches primordial unity, the evolution of souls passes through two main phases: expansion... which is considered the fall of the spirit into the material, and then the return towards unity, which would be the second phase of evolution.

This is why spiritual evolution is considered to be like the capacity to let the Unity, before the separation, prevail...the whole before the part...and so, the Simplicity before the complexity. As a fact, being conscious of "One" - even if this one includes all - is always simpler than having to remember a lot. Like in a puzzle, we begin with a lot of fragments, confusion and chaos, and slowly we bring order to the fragments, relating the one with the others, until we can perceive the whole picture as one. When the last fragment takes its place, the separating lines between the fragments - called the main

illusion in Buddhism - disappear and the only reality is the simplicity of the unity of the puzzle.

It is not by surprise when reading words of wisdom from great philosophers from all times and all cultures, that our attention is often drawn to their capacity to explain with a few simple words what is still for us a complex idea. This is because they have reached the simplicity of unity.

**The time of our life can be used to prepare for the next stage...just as the time of death is, in a way, preparation for the next life.**

## II - The Path of Evolution is Cyclic, Not Linear.

As a universal law, all of evolution is cyclic, not linear. We know, for example, the cycle of the seasons during the year, the alternating cycle of day and night, and even the short cycle of inhalation-exhalation which keeps us alive.

This cyclic aspect of passing time is expressed in the Orient by the symbol of the Pa-Kua - the alternation of the Yin and the Yang in the Chinese tradition. These cycles are not considered different from a consciousness of Unity in essence, but they are diverse aspects of the same law...and the alternating cycle of life and death, is no more than another expression of the same and unique law.

In the Occident, in ancient Egypt, there was no specific word for "sleep"...it was called "the little death", meaning that the nature of death and sleep is the same. The only difference would be the duration of the cycle, and the fact that just as we wake-up with the same body but wear different clothes every day, we "awake" from death - or reincarnate - into a new body. In a sense, our body is no more than more durable clothes.

In this way, if we don't fear sleep, why should we fear death?

## III - There is no arbitrary Divine Judgment

Reincarnation is considered a natural process, the application of natural laws and is not a punishment - or the reward - we get from a divine judgment.

The oriental traditions have developed the concepts of *Dharma* and *Karma*, where *Dharma* stands for "Law" and *Karma* would be the energy measuring the distance between what we are and what we aim to be... or in other words, between us and our "personal *Dharma*" or *Svadharmā*, something like the *tikun* of the Kabbalah.



by sciencefreak | phtabay / CCO

When the moment of death arrives, if no *Karma* is present it means that the soul has reached its aim, has reached the unit. Such a soul would be free from the *Samsara*, the cycle of reincarnations, and nothing in the world could force it to return. In contrast, if any *Karma* is still present, the natural process of evolution would cause this soul to reincarnate for another cycle, again and again, to have more opportunities to reduce the distance to, and reach, the aim.

In Egypt, we find the symbol of the "Judgment of the Death" where the heart of the deceased is weighed against the feather of Maat, a symbol of Justice.

If the heart of the deceased is heavier than the feather, then a "monster" will eat the heart and cause the rebirth of the soul. This monster has a body of a hippo, a symbol of pregnancy, and the head of a crocodile, which in Egypt was a symbol of ignorance; thus, the meaning would be that ignorance causes reincarnation. In contrast, if the feather is heavier than the heart, then the soul of the deceased is presented to Osiris, the "god of the dead" and accepted into the "Amen-Ti" - literally the Sacred (Amen) Earth (Ti), or Paradise.

Now...how can the heart be lighter than a feather? What is really Maat, the concept of Justice in Egypt? Justice is to be conscious of our own potential and to be able to express it in the right way in everyday life. If someone has any physical, emotional, intellectual or spiritual potential in life but does not use it, it is considered as an injustice, in the sense of a lack of respect towards Nature; not developing the potential nature has given us is like not living in accordance with the oriental *Svadharmā*...and this would cause the return of the soul. But there is more: this potential has to be used in the "right way", and right means to use it to serve Nature and not to search for personal benefit.

## **Justice is to be conscious of our own potential and to be able to express it in the right way in everyday life.**

In the ancient Egyptian Temples, on the wall of the Naos, the spiritual heart of the Temple, we can see symbolic scenes of Pharaoh "doing the Maat"; in other words, having to prove that he had made good use of his power and authority to be able to enter this part of the Temple. He had to prove every

day that his aim was to serve his people, and not to gain any benefit from his position. Of course, we are talking here of the archetype of what a "King-Priest" has to be, and we know well that history did not always exactly reflect this archetype.

In all cases, in the Orient as in the Occident, each one of us is held responsible for his own destiny, reincarnation or liberation, determined by our own acts. In this way, wisdom is the perception of the One-Law and the capacity to live according to it.

### **IV - Man is a Complex Entity, both Material and Spiritual**

Man is considered a bridge, and this makes him special in the evolution process. A part of him can be considered material: the physical body, of course, but also our energy, our sentiments and even our ideas. In fact, all that can take "form" (an idea too can have form, limited by words and concepts), and the intellect can capture. All this, ideas, sentiments and of course the physical body is born, evolves and dies. All of these are temporal.

At the other end, another part of us can be considered spiritual. This would be the "soul", all that is above the intellect - and because of this, the intellect has no way to perceive it, to "see" it, and of course to "prove" its existence. This is the eternal part of us, the reincarnating spirit. The material part is only the "clothes" we wear when we reincarnate... and it is different each time.

This means that the "real" man is the inner one, the invisible or spiritual one. But by being exclusively spiritual he cannot act directly in everyday life and so needs a support, a filter, to express himself. Just like an actor at a theater wears the mask of a character to play his role on the theaters stage, but then leaves it and wears another one in a next play, we too are all wearing a material personality to play our part on the stage of the world...and we too shall leave it until the moment to wear another one arrives...in another incarnation.



All our difficulties to understand and accept these concepts - commonly accepted in ancient civilizations - come from our identification with our personality (our mask); we are unaware of our true nature. This is why the Path to wisdom always begins by what is known today as the Delphi's adage: "Know Yourself".

**This means that the "real" man is the inner one, the invisible or spiritual one. But by being exclusively spiritual he cannot act directly in everyday life and so needs a support, a filter, to express himself.**

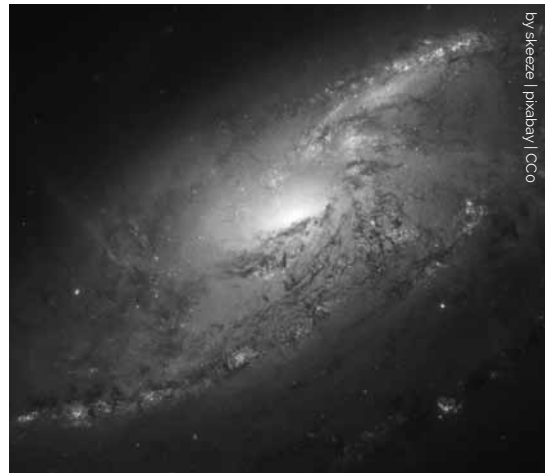
#### **The Process of Death...and Reincarnation**

The process of what we call death for Man is explained as the separation of the 2 natures: the spiritual and the material. Death is not just a moment, but a duration of time...just like we need time to remove our clothes, beginning by the most external, taking them off one after the other, until being completely nude only at the end of the process...death is the same thing: we leave our different material supports, beginning by the most dense, one after the other.

So the first bodies to leave would be the physical and energetic ones, then the emotional, and at the end, the mental.

Most traditions speak about a bright light one can see a moment after the physical death. It's the same light which is recalled by those who have experienced an NDE (Near Death Experience) and which is called by the Bardo-Thodol, the Tibetan Book of the Dead, as the "First Primordial Light". Evolution being mainly a process of consciousness toward globality, unity and simplicity (the complexity in the evolution of the biological form is the

evolution of the support of the consciousness). This light is considered the ultimate simplicity, unity...and consciousness: it is the light of Truth, of the Divine Intelligence, *Dharma*, Theos, or God, or whatever name humans choose to give it. He who will be able to recognize this light at the very moment of death will in fact recognize the ultimate consciousness in the world. As there is no step remaining to go forward, such a soul will have reached liberation from this process and will not return to a new body. But for the rest of us, who cannot recognize this light because our limited consciousness is not capable to "capture" it, we just see...nothing. The darkness we see is only our inability to see the light... and with passing time, the "First Primordial Light" becomes the "Second Primordial Light", then the Third...and so on. The consciousness is limiting itself in the manner of the Kabbalistic "tsimsum" until it reaches the point where we can recognize it; at that moment, we shall see the brightest light we are able to recognize, and THAT is the light at the end of the tunnel...In other words, it is the junction between the lower divine consciousness and the higher human one.



Once the light has been reached there is no possible return into the same body. Then the process continues, the soul shedding its bodies, like the physical body, its clothes, until it reaches

the complete nudity, and this would be...the intellectual consciousness. So, if we were able to develop a true spiritual consciousness during our life, or in other words, to develop a part of what in India is called Manas, Buddhi and Atma, which could be understood as Intelligence (not to know more, but to know better, to be able to separate the truth from the false), Intuition (which is Enlightenment) and Will (which is something our words cannot define)...then, and only then, can we stay conscious in the nudity of the after-death. This is because all the material nature, all that was born in this specific incarnation, will die with it. If our consciousness is only material - emotional and intellectual - it will die with the after-death and we shall get a new consciousness - materialistic as well - only the next time we shall "wear" a material body. In contrast, developing here and now, during our lifetime, a spiritual consciousness will allow us to stay conscious even after death and will allow us

to reach the continuity of consciousness between one life and another.

### **In Conclusion**

And afterwards...well, after this the cycle goes on. A natural process similar to the one which initiates the process of death will initiate the process of re-birth. It is called "*Skandas*" in the Orient, and it's technical description is beyond the scope of this simple article. The important thing is to understand that the reincarnation theory is based on the idea that the Roman Philosophical Emperor Marcus Aurelius wrote: "Death is a natural process, and there is nothing bad in nature." So there is no need to fear death.

**Developing here and now, during our lifetime, a spiritual consciousness will allow us to stay conscious even after death and will allow us to reach the continuity of consciousness between one life and another.**

We have all our life to prepare ourselves for death, and this means: doing our best to live "justly", according to the Egyptian Maat, to develop our true potential, to conquer our true identity, to detach ourselves from the ignorance and the apparent... To prepare ourselves for death is in fact to reach our real and spiritual essence; it allows us to live our life plainly because we don't have to fear death any more.

This is the philosophical base of this theory...which is for some of us more than a theory: it allows us to gain our freedom, and it says to us that we are all the masters of our own destiny. ★★★

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This article was first published in Hebrew in August 2007 in the Acropolis Magazine of Israel. Mr. Pierre Poulain is the Founder of New Acropolis in Israel and New Acropolis International Organization Coordinator for Africa, Asia & Oceania.

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# RE-EXAMINING CORPORATE INDIA'S SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY: IN CONVERSATION WITH PADMA SHRI ANU AGA

BY MANJULA NANAVATI

**Ms.** Anu Aga emanates the serenity of one who has successfully steered her life out of turbulence and is at peace with the cards that life dealt her, and the choices she has made along the way. Her petite frame however, is monumentally deceptive for she is a colossal force to reckon with.

She is a pioneer of corporate social responsibility in India, having set up the Thermax Social Initiative Foundation long before government legislation instituted CSR requirements. Having earned the prestigious Padma Shri, she is perhaps one of India's most influential philanthropists and serves on the boards of Akanksha and Teach For India, as well as a variety of parliamentary forums for Law and Justice, Public Grievances, and Women's Empowerment.

We met at her Pune office to explore her pioneering spirit. Here are excerpts from our conversation.

**Anu Aga:** Soon after my husband died, I took over as chairperson of Thermax. The Indian economy was going through a downturn and our company performance suffered. My executives insisted, "Don't worry, when the economy turns around

we will do well. After all, since you own 62% of the company it affects you the most." Unfortunately I bought that argument. Then I received an anonymous letter from a shareholder saying, "Mrs. Aga - I feel Thermax has let me down. And you have let me down." This letter gave me sleepless nights and I realized I had been foolish to accept that explanation from my executives. That's when I decided I could no longer sit on my hands.

***I think everyone is capable of doing something. It could be money, time, talent, or management resources. At some level it is relatively easier to write a cheque and think your responsibility is over.***

**The Acropolitan (TA):** So your mindset at that time was that Thermax needed to make as much profit as possible?

**Anu:** Well if you're in business you owe it to your

shareholders to make a profit. After all you're not in business for charity. But having made a profit, how you use it is an entirely different thing.

**TA: So would you say that profit is just a means rather than an end?**

**Anu:** I believe that the purpose of business is human wellbeing. But I don't think it's an either profits or human wellbeing situation. It has to be both. You can make profits by running a humane organization. To increase profits by unethical means is not acceptable.



**TA: How does one engender this conscientious idealism nationally, in both an individual and corporate capacity?**

**Anu:** I think if people are genuine and really want to do something...it's possible. By and large, I don't think corporations really want to do something about it because they stand to gain from this status quo. Individually it's more difficult, but business groups like CII and FICCI could collectively decide to fight corruption; that would be effective because the government would be powerless if we all join hands. I think a dialogue between government and businesses is important. At the very least, honest people should not be forced into corruption by the system.

**TA: It must take a lot of courage to put ethics above profit..**

**Anu:** It is very difficult. But at the end of the day you have to live with yourself. There are some forms of corruption that are extremely difficult to fight. Our turnover has suffered tremendously because we do not want to take short cuts. But sometimes we are forced to, because running a 100% honest business is next to impossible. As a family we feel very strongly that we must have a moral code. My late husband used to say that profit is not a set of numbers, but a set of values. Today our entire board and executives are all convinced that profit at any cost, is just not worth it.

***All of us are going to die; yet our lack of preparedness and knowledge makes us view this as a tragedy. To me, what is inevitable cannot be a tragedy.***

**TA: So business organizations are not just stand-alone entities in a corporate rat race. But they have a social responsibility?**

**Anu:** Yes. This responsibility dictated our choice of sphere of activity. We do not deal in liquor or cigarettes; we have chosen energy and environment because they are socially relevant. Moreover, my father, husband and son always believed that our wealth should not be used for our personal consumption only; that a large part of our earnings must be applied toward social causes. But it was only after my husband's death, after we went public, that we had profits in hand and my daughter and I could take that vision forward.

I met Shaheen Mistry in Mumbai and brought Akanksha to Pune, where we ran centers to

augment the education that children from low-income families were receiving in public schools. Shortly we recognized that if we ran the schools themselves, we would have much more influence on the quality of education and values that the children were receiving. We now run 7 schools in Mumbai and 8 in Pune. The next step was to influence the education system itself, and Teach For India took up that mission. Based on our experience in India, this model has spread to 40 countries where the biggest costs are borne by the government, including the stipend paid to fellows and the cost of their residency. But we get no help from our government and our budget for the next year is Sixty-Five Crores. But I honestly feel that when you're doing something good, money will never be a problem. I have complete faith in that.

**TA: But when resources are scarce and one is consumed with meeting basic needs, it must become harder to take individual responsibility for the larger collective. So perhaps with great power comes great responsibility?**

**Anu:** Absolutely. But I think everyone is capable of doing something. It could be money, time, talent, or

management resources. At some level it is relatively easier to write a cheque and think your responsibility is over.

***But I believe that as human beings we are all connected to each other. So how can you be isolated and think only of yourself? Self indulgence must have a limit.***

**TA: So you believe every human being has a social responsibility regardless of resources?**

**Anu:** I can't be prescriptive. But I believe that as human beings we are all connected to each other. So how can you be isolated and think only of yourself? Self indulgence must have a limit. Again it's a personal choice but I feel when you connect to each other by reaching out, how ever it might be, it is truly fulfilling. You wouldn't think twice before reaching out to your family; can you extend this idea of family to the human race? Yet I too limit myself by geographical boundaries. With my resources





I cannot reach out to women in African countries for example, where I know there is a crying need. But I have drawn a line, and each one has to decide where their boundaries lie.



**TA: And each one can strive to extend our boundaries beyond the limits that we have drawn?**

**Anu:** That would be wonderful! And in my experience, the more you extend these boundaries the happier you become.

**TA: And how do you define happiness? Is it a state of mind? Something that is within?**

**Anu:** Perhaps I take material comforts for granted because I'm blessed with abundance. Without a home to live in, would I be able to espouse this philosophy? I don't know. But the reality is that I have more than enough to fulfill my needs. I can afford to have my happiness criteria emanating from within. To me happiness is the achievement of goals that I have set for myself, having meaningful relationships with people I care for, and living a life that is not knotted up with regrets. Spreading happiness begins with your own wellbeing because the more water a pot contains the more water it can give to others.

**TA: You have confronted death and battled devastating grief and yet found strength in the midst of adversity to achieve so much. What allowed you to be able to do this so successfully?**

**Anu:** While a lot of people have difficulty with their past, I was worried about how will I manage the future and the company. I didn't think I deserved to be chairperson. I felt I was in that position only because of my majority shareholding. I kept devaluing myself.

Vipassana philosophy tells us everything is impermanent. I have come to believe that all of this is a game, an illusion. And the less attached you are to things and people, the more you can take life in your stride. I read a lot of books about death after my husband died and then when my son died it was very, very difficult. But somehow god had prepared me for it through my daily meditation and reading.

The sun rises and sets. We don't clap our hands in jubilation each time it rises and go into deep mourning when it sets; we have accepted this cycle as a matter-of-course. However, we have not accepted the cycle of life and death. All of us are going to die; yet our lack of preparedness and knowledge makes us view this as a tragedy. To me, what is inevitable cannot be a tragedy. When you cannot live peacefully with people who matter, when you do not invest in yourself while you are alive, that is a tragedy.

***When you take the perspective of a thousand rebirths, of what significance is this little pinpoint of time here. But the beauty of life is that each one must find his own meaning.***

**TA: What can we do to prepare ourselves better for life, as well as death? There is such a wealth of knowledge that has come down to us through ancient wisdom...**

**Anu:** Philosophy by itself can sometimes become

purely an intellectual pursuit. Will philosophy alone help you to come to terms with death? I doubt it, because it's your heart that has to heal and that cannot happen through intellect alone. Philosophy can make you think, and my reading certainly helped me. But what healed me was my heart, and that was not a cognitive process.

**TA: That's why it is essential to live and practice philosophy so that it travels from the realm of your mind and emanates from your heart.**

**Anu:** But you know for most people when life is going smoothly they don't feel the need to take time out for something that is not a priority. The priority is acquisition, one-upmanship...unfortunately if these are our priorities then we are heading for trouble.

**TA: You have said you believe in God.**

**Anu:** I'm not a religious person though I was born Zoroastrian, and I do go to the fire temple. But it doesn't mean anything special to me. I don't feel God there. Sometimes though, when you cannot make sense of things on earth, I feel there must be someone up there that has a master plan. Just like when you scold a child, the child may think you are cruel; but you have a plan and your intention is good. So too, God's intention is good. You come to this life to experience what you have chosen to experience, be it death, poverty, or disability. So you might think: why is Anu suffering so much? But I think of it as an opportunity, a learning process. And when you take the perspective of a thousand rebirths, of what significance is this little pinpoint of time here. But the beauty of life is that each one must find his own meaning. There is no right or wrong answer. You must keep searching to discover what makes sense to you.

**TA: Is there an important lesson you have learned that our readers could benefit from?**

**Anu:** Please don't make me larger than life. I've

stumbled and failed numerous times. Every journey wavers and you take a few steps backwards before you can go forward again. Although we shun difficult moments, it is precisely when we are pushed into a corner that the best within us is set free. We can choose to remain stuck in the corner, full of self-pity, or we can realize that there is a whole room available for us to move through and explore.

***If we can bring down our egos, if only a little, and stop thinking the world revolves around us, it would make a huge difference to our lives.***

And that is something we have to do for ourselves. The external world can help you a little bit. But the most important thing we have to realize is that we all have our own personal power to tap into, an internal force that we can strengthen by investing in ourselves. "Our stay on Earth is short, our roles dispensable, and our impact inconsequential." If we can bring down our egos, if only a little, and stop thinking the world revolves around us, it would make a huge difference to our lives and the lives of those close to us. ★★★



Image Courtesy/ Anu/Agar

# BEST OF THE HUMAN POTENTIAL THROUGH SPORTS

BY KURUSH DORDI



**The** year is 1936. The Olympic Games in Munich are underway and Adolf Hitler, Chancellor of Germany, publicly comments, "The sportive, knightly battle awakens the best human characteristics. It doesn't separate, but unites, the combatants in understanding and respect. It also helps to connect the countries in the spirit of peace. That's why the Olympic flame should never die." (1) Behind this facade of unity, however, was the hope that the superiority of the 'pure' Aryan blood race would be definitively showcased.

In this context, German Lutz Long, set an Olympic record on his way to qualifying for the Long Jump finals. African American Jesse Owens had fouled on his first two attempts and was staring at a disqualification on the third. Before he made his stride, Long walked up to him and suggested he pre-mark his take-off spot a couple of inches before the foul line thus ensuring that he would miss the foul line and at least qualify. Owens took his advice and cleared the jump to qualify for the finals; he went on to win the gold, eventually setting a new world record. The lap of honour after the jump in the finals by Owens and Long, became a beacon of triumph of the Olympic spirit over racial differences. Speaking to journalists over the years,

Owens described, "It took a lot of courage for him to befriend me in front of Hitler." (2)

**Plato suggests that beyond the prize and glory, the true celebration of spirit is the motivation towards excellence that emerges from will (internal) rather than competition (external).**

The Olympics have produced some memorable moments of great sportsmanship and fraternity, illustrating the victory of the human spirit. As is summarised by the Olympic motto, "Citius, Altius, Fortius", which translates to "Faster, Higher, Stronger", every athlete aspires for the best of the human potential. When a sportsman wins, the victory is not just owing to a particular skill that has been practiced for many years; the victory also celebrates the hardships and the breakthroughs

of barriers that enabled the athlete to reach the podium. It is victory of the mind over the body when a marathon runner crosses the finish line. The victory of a boxer lies in his determination, as he rises every time he is knocked down. It is a victory of team spirit, when a crew team paddles in unison towards victory. And it is a victory of harmony when synchronised swimmers execute a routine with grace and poise. Sport is thus a medium through which to manifest the inner strength of character; virtues that collectively as human beings we aspire for, but perhaps find it difficult to express in our day-to-day lives.

**Sport ingrains values that go beyond the development of physical excellence: discipline, perseverance, hard work and acceptance.**

Plato suggests that beyond the prize and glory, the true celebration of spirit is the motivation towards excellence that emerges from will (internal) rather than competition (external). (3) Many tournaments traditionally end with the ceremonial handshake signifying the basic respect for opponents as competitors, fellow human beings, each sharing in the aspiration for perfection. And respectful admiration of this mutual aspiration is honoured as more valuable than personal victory.

Cross country skier Anton Gafarov was nearing the end of the Men's sprint at the semi-final in the Sochi Winter Olympics 2014 when he suffered a bad fall that damaged his ski blade. Not one to give up, even though he had already failed to qualify, he was keen to finish the race in front of his home team. He continued, only for his ski to snap. Waiting in the wings, the Canadian team coach Justin Wadsworth

raced onto the track with a spare and personally replaced Gafarov's broken ski saying, "I wanted him to have dignity as he crossed the finish line!" (4) In our times, when man is fighting man in the most insane ways, sports provide us an arena to come together and put differences aside.

Staged every four years at the foot of Mt. Olympus, the origins of the Olympics are thought to be part of an ancient Greek religious festival held in honour of the gods that represented virtues; spiritual archetypes such as Truth, Beauty, Justice, and Harmony. People from all over the Greek world are said to have gathered to compete and watch the games, demonstrating the collective aspiration that these divine principles be expressed in the earthly world. These higher archetypes are also collectively symbolized by the Olympic flame kept alive through the duration of the Games. Even today the Olympic torch is kindled by the light of the sun at the site of the ancient temple of Hera and carried around the world before it is used to light the Olympic flame at the venue. The element of fire, always rising upwards, symbolises the upward yearning spirit driving man – to be the best that man can be...and sports can be a channel to express this spiritual aspiration.

One defining aspect of the spirit of sport is the importance attributed to ethics. At the 1932 Games in Los Angeles, 21-year old British fencer Judy Guinness was on her way to a gold medal, when she walked up to the judges and informed them that they had twice failed to deduct her score; her opponent Austrian Ellen Preis had actually touched her twice. Guinness therefore relinquished the win and accepted the silver instead.

Such exemplary ethics can be witnessed in cricket as well. Several batsmen are known to have simply walked off the pitch, even if the umpire missed identifying a minor nick to ball on the way for a caught behind. In doing so, ethical sportsmen admirably honour truth above personal glory. Although not always clearly evident, this requires a great deal of

courage. And athletes therefore are role models who showcase ethics, fair play, and honesty.



As the sports industry has matured, and with big money now involved in most sports around the world, however, we see a sharp fall of ethics, with cases of substance abuse, 'doping', and match fixing scandals surfacing. The motivation in sport has sadly fallen to personal victory, driven by monetary rewards and superficial fame making what once used to be a ceremonial celebration of the human spirit into just another materially driven business.

Greece, considered the mother of classical philosophy, attached great significance to the relationship between sports and philosophy. Plato exhorted that a good education must develop virtue in man; gymnastics and sports are essential components of education which, beyond physical fitness, develop the value of fortitude. It is also evident that through sports, one develops self-confidence and morality.

Besides sportsmanship, sport ingrains values that go beyond the development of physical excellence: discipline, perseverance, hard work and acceptance.

Discipline is fostered through a regime of training, controlled diet, and perseverance. Not every match can be won always. Not every opponent can be defeated always. And therefore, perseverance; accepting failure as a part of life. Rather than discouragement, they can become opportunities that motivate constant improvement; training harder, practicing longer, repeated battling of inner challenges. Sportspersons, for example, often imply that the only real way to attain victory is to overcome fear of defeat. As Olympic gymnast Nadia Comaneci once said "I don't run away from a

challenge because I am afraid. Instead, I run toward it because the only way to escape fear is to trample it beneath your feet." (5) The external expression of excellence on the field is therefore a reflection of inner strength of character.

For this reason, many organisations today rely on sports based activities when conducting workshops to develop leadership and teamwork. Such exercises highlight the value of working together to extract the power of the collective. In order to do so, each team is led by a captain who possesses special skills and is therefore best suited to lead. And yet, in spite of stellar individual feats, only a collective team effort enables a win or loss. As part of this pyramidalic hierarchy, the captain gives the team motivation and direction, but each team member is an essential and integral participant. Each individual within the team has a specific role to play, each strives for excellence in this role, which affects the entire team's performance. In cricket for instance, we have seen many defeats in spite of stellar batting by individuals such as Sachin Tendulkar; as a collective, the team could not outplay the opposition.

Today in the age of multi-million dollar sponsorships, politics in sport, sport for money and for glory, perhaps its true value remains in its ability to foster harmony and the expression of the human spirit. Long after the music of the national anthems end after the presentation ceremony, what lingers is the sentiment of the best of the human potential; always Faster, Higher, and Stronger. ★★★

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# THE VARIOUS FACES OF THE DIVINE FEMININE

BY SANGEETA IYER

Aphrodite – Classical Greek goddess of Love and Beauty

*O Mother,  
Thou who art present everywhere,  
Thou who art the embodiment of Power and Energy,  
I Bow to Thee! I Bow to Thee! I Bow to Thee!  
- Invocation to Shakti, the Feminine Principle*

**The** universe is a place of balance... *Yin* and *Yang*, night and day, summer and winter, masculine and feminine. A balance achieved by complementarity – the equal and opposite effect of dualistic entities. Yin is as essential as Yang, just as night is as essential as day; each has its role and function in the service of life as a whole. So too, the feminine is as essential as the masculine. While they may appear to be diametrically opposed in nature, they are equally important in maintaining the wholeness of life by complementing each other. It is, in fact, this very dualism that enriches life with the kind of friction it needs to make movement possible, that forward and upward movement that facilitates evolution. The dualism of opposing forces makes life vibrant with diversity, and complete in unity, meshed in a unifying harmony that works together, aligned with the rhythm of life.

But when one half seems not to fulfil its role accurately, when women try to be like men, to get 'ahead' in the

world for example, they appear to surrender some of the unique power of being feminine, so as to gain what they think they're missing, by not being masculine. Perhaps it's the same when men express more effeminate behaviour, surrendering some of their innate masculinity, in favour of obtaining the 'metrosexual' tag.



Green Tara from Tibetan Buddhist Tradition

And yet, qualities are qualities and their eternal essence endures across time, space and gender. The drive to seek Truth, to honour Justice, to be inspired by Beauty and to do Good in the world applies to everyone, whether they are young or old, men or women. These are everybody's privilege and, in fact everybody's duty. Perhaps there are different paths of reaching them, depending on the

energy that is dominant within each one - masculine or feminine. And instead of trying to be more 'like the other', what if we concentrated on tapping more into that infinite power that each one inherently has, as the seed of potential within? How empowering would it be to discover it, unearth it, nurture it and make it grow into a whole Tree of Life that would feed and shelter the spirits of generations to come? Why not develop the tools that Nature has endowed us with, and unlock their potential, instead of trying to acquire something else?

**The drive to seek Truth, to honour Justice, to be inspired by Beauty and to do Good in the world applies to everyone, whether they are young or old, men or women. These are everybody's privilege and, in fact everybody's duty.**

For there is a power in gentleness which is unharnessed in strength – and yet, we need both. There is a power in surrender which is absent in seizing – and yet, we need both. There is a power in acceptance which is missing in argument – and yet, we need both. Perhaps wisdom is demonstrated by knowing when to use what; to discern between the need to act with assertion and the need to give in with grace. To know when we should take a stand with an emphatic attitude and when we should accept another perspective with gratitude.

So how do we learn to be all of these different things? To embody so many different qualities in one, without feeling conflicted within? For women,

perhaps the answer lies in the inspiration inherent in the gamut of feminine ideals in front of us.

### **Her Various Faces**

From the gentle, graceful and seemingly docile Mary of *The Goddess in the Gospels* (a book by Margaret Starbird) to the fiery, tempestuous goddess Durga, the Divine Feminine encompasses various shades: beauty, courage, justice, love, goodness, purity, compassion and hope – all of these presented in various hues and symbolized in multiple forms across cultures.



We revere these deities as the epitome of these qualities, the ultimate that we can ever aspire to be. We worship them with the hope that their qualities rub off on us somehow, as if we could have a little of their divine power on our side, to meet our ends. But what we should actually be doing is drawing inspiration from them to imbibe their essence and adopt their immortal qualities in our day-to-day lives. To seek just a drop of their grace that could transform us from being biologically female to become a channel of the divine feminine...filled with higher qualities that change the way we are, in our earthly lives.

But how do we actually do this? At first glance, there seem to be more questions than answers, because there is a pantheon of role models from whom to seek inspiration and each one seems very different from the other. Can we learn from all of them and make ourselves more capable? How

great would it be to have all their qualities - from the giving, forgiving nature of Sita to the brave and tempestuous fire of Durga? Or the grace of Mother Mary and the courage of Athena, in equal measure? Or the creative power of Saraswati along with the divine beauty of Venus! Can we be a little of each and come closer to a feminine ideal that covers the entire gamut of potential and possibility?

What strikes me as the most beautiful insight about the divine feminine, is that no matter what form she takes, the underlying sentiment is that of love in all its myriad forms. This is perhaps best expressed by the goddess of love herself, Venus, who represents that which is beyond what we know of as 'human' love and encompasses a spectrum of love's diverse aspects. When we use language to define it, we tend to telescope it into a single word - 'love', grossly inadequate to convey the vastness of Love in its entirety.

**There is a power in gentleness which is unharnessed in strength – and yet, we need both. There is a power in surrender which is absent in seizing – and yet, we need both. There is a power in acceptance which is missing in argument – and yet, we need both.**

Venus, or Aphrodite, is associated with sexuality and fertility but also embodies the qualities of motherly love, love between friends, and spiritual love. The Founder of New Acropolis, Jorge Angel Livraga

Rizzi, has described Botticelli's *Primavera* depicting Venus: "...who rules over the past, the present and the future. She is the central axis. She is the Platonic Love which rules over all that is manifested, and takes whatever form is required according to the needs and the degree of consciousness of each individual." (2) Perhaps we'd do well to bear in mind that love is more expansive than we think, and transcends the need to have someone love us back on a personal level. The most amazing thing about it: the more one gives, the more it fills us from within.



In a different form, the limitless love and unstinting commitment of Isis is celebrated as mystic. Mythology describes her diligent search for the scattered body of her husband Osiris after he'd been murdered. With the help of Thoth and Anubis, she pieced him together again and facilitated his resurrection. Her devotion is, however, a reflection of a deeper truth...a spiritual yearning for the ultimate destination, the search for wisdom. Isis is also perceived to be the divine mother and her suckling of the infant Horus is believed to be the precursor of the defining representation of Mother Mary, with the infant Jesus at her breast.

Athena is the multifaceted goddess of wisdom, courage, inspiration, civilization, law and justice, mathematics, strength, war strategy, the arts and crafts. She is known for her calm temperament. Portrayed as a shrewd companion and patron goddess of heroic endeavour, she is noted to have

fought for justice, rejecting any battle that lacked purpose. How much this attitude could help us fight for Truth!

Kuan Yin, the Chinese goddess of mercy, helps childless couples conceive, heals the sick, is the patron of travellers and farmers, and protects souls in times of travail. She is also known to be the goddess who knows when to push the fledgling from the nest. (1) Perhaps true parental love would be to do just that, knowing when to push our fledglings out from their nest instead of molly-coddling them well into adulthood. Genuine parenting perhaps engenders independence in children, making them self-reliant and capable of not just tackling the challenges of life but growing in spirit by fostering individual investigation. Parental love also means allowing children to make mistakes and learn from them, however hard that is to do! But that is what will help them grow – to try, to fail, to try again and again, until they succeed. We can stand on the side lines and guide them, but we cannot walk the walk for them. This unselfish act will help them to truly spread the wings of their potential and become who they can be...to fulfil their destinies as human beings.

The tradition of Tibetan Buddhism venerates the goddess Tara in 21 different forms based on colour and energy, of which Green Tara and White Tara are more well-known. As a whole, Tārā embodies many of the qualities of the feminine principle. She is known as the Mother of Mercy and Compassion, and gives birth to warmth and relief from bad karma as experienced by beings in cyclic existence. She engenders, nourishes, smiles at the vitality of creation, and has sympathy for all beings as a mother does for her children. As Green Tārā she offers succour and protection from all the unfortunate circumstances one can encounter within the *samsaric* world. As White Tārā she expresses maternal compassion and offers healing to beings that are hurt or wounded, either mentally or psychically. Certainly, all of us could bring more joy, healing, and hope to the world with these qualities.

In the pantheon of Hinduism, there is a feminine triad composed of the consorts of the masculine trinity Brahma-Vishnu-Shiva, which is of Saraswati-Lakshmi-Parvati. In her other avatars, Parvati also manifests as Durga or Kali. Some worship Goddess Durga as Shakti, mother of the universe, believed to be the energy behind the work of creation, preservation and destruction of the world – the power that breathes life-force into everything that is.



### Life-Force

Now there's a clue. The feminine principle sustains *life*; brings beauty, love, gentleness and caring to a situation. But let's not forget the other aspect: force. An energy. A power. A driving momentum that makes things happen, charging them with life and energizing them.

Again, perhaps the one word that begins to define this force is love. Not the personal, individual kind that we feel for a person, but the life-creating, life-nurturing kind that we could feel for all humanity if we expand ourselves. And like the harmony between opposites that maintains balance in life, love too, has two aspects: compassion and courage. Perhaps the former is linked more closely to 'life' and the latter to 'force'.

## Reviving the Lost Art of Being a Lady

Even in everyday life, love is the greatest quality that the feminine aspect can bring to bear on life. In her book *It's Always Possible*, Kiran Bedi speaks about how she transformed the inner lives of the inmates of Tihar Jail when she took over as Inspector General of Prisons. On her first day, she addressed all the inmates assembled together and asked them, "Do you pray?" The bewildered inmates thought they hadn't heard her correctly, so she had to repeat her question. She then continued to lead them in prayer. It was the first time that someone had treated the inmates as human beings rather than as criminals. Soon, Bedi introduced regular yoga and *pranayama* sessions, working on their spirit, day after day. (3) In this case, love took the form of compassion and exemplary inner strength borne out of the sensitivity to recognize the need of the inmates to heal internally...to be guided towards a better self and have the opportunity to atone, rather than just be punished externally. Punishment alone would not erase the motives that made them turn to crime in the first place – in fact it may even breed resentment, perpetuating a vicious cycle of crime. What's more, to do this as a woman in a strongly masculine profession, and under tremendous systemic pressure to 'let things go on as before', takes courage as well as determination.



Malala Yousafzai took a bullet to the head, but that did not stop her from speaking out about the

importance of educating girls. Already a champion for the cause of girls being allowed to go to school in her neighbourhood, she made the best use of her traumatic experience and treated it as a springboard to champion this cause in the global arena, having earned the chance to stand at the podium of global advocacy – the United Nations. She became a shining example of love endowed with courage, beyond concern for her personal self. How much more we could achieve for our brothers and sisters, our fellow-beings, if we could show this kind of courage in standing up for the greater good, at any cost to ourselves!

## The Daily Choice

In every moment of our lives, there is a choice that comes before us: do we give love, acceptance, compassion and hope? Or do we withhold it? Do we exhibit courage in standing up for what is right, express determination to uphold it and take action on the side of justice? Or do we fail to do so? Do we tap into the higher principles and bring them to our earthly relationships or do we forfeit the opportunity? There are umpteen opportunities on a daily basis...opportunities to draw inspiration from the many facets of the divine feminine and imbibe a little of their spirit. Enabling us to persevere through challenges and overcome not just a single obstacle, but a series of hurdles...to win not just one battle against our circumstances, but another, and another, day after day, battle after battle, always ready for more, yearning to grow – another step further, another step higher.

Because it all comes down to who we really want to be – the victim or the victor. We have the choice, every single day. ★★★

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1. Kallenbach, Laurel. *Oh, Goddess! Is feminine divinity what's missing in your spiritual life?* Gaia Life: Your Guide to Better Living. <<http://life.gaiam.com/article/oh-goddess-feminine-divinity-whats-missing-your-spiritual-life>>
  2. Ohmann, Isabelle and Schwarz, Fernand. *The Spirit of the Renaissance*. Nouvelle Acropole, France, 2005.
  3. Bedi, Kiran. *It's Always Possible*. Sterling Publishers Private Limited, 1998.
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# SCHEDULE OF PUBLIC EVENTS

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## REALITY OF DREAMS

Lecture @ **Khar**

**Saturday, 2nd July 2016**

6:00PM (2hrs), FREE ADMISSION

Myths and legends suggest that dreams might be a gateway to another world. What are dreams really and what do they represent? Join us as we explore the relationship between dreams and reality.



## HERCULES: THE HERO WITHIN

Lecture @ **Colaba (Main Centre)**

**Saturday, 23rd July 2016**

6:00PM (2hrs), FREE ADMISSION

Greek mythology celebrates the glorious feats of the heroic Hercules. Half-god, half-man, Hercules is especially famed for the completion of 12 tasks, through which he fulfills the purpose of his life. Join us as we investigate how this hero is still relevant to our lives today.



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## THE WAY OF THE SAMURAI

Lecture @ **Colaba (Main Centre)**

**Saturday, 9th July 2016**

6:00PM (2hrs), FREE ADMISSION

Far from being violent or bloodthirsty savages, it is said that the actions of the Samurai were governed by strict codes of conduct, founded on human principles such as fraternity, courage and discipline. Join us as we explore how their warrior spirit can inspire us in our own battles of daily life.



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## DEVELOPING MINDFULNESS

Lecture @ **Khar**

**Saturday, 23rd July 2016**

6:00PM (2hrs), FREE ADMISSION

Can we maintain our inner peace without being influenced by the constant stimulation of our environment? Join us as we explore how to bring more depth, meaning and life to each moment.

# SCHEDULE OF PUBLIC EVENTS

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## PATTERNS IN NATURE

Lecture @ **Colaba (Main Centre)**  
**Saturday, 6th August 2016**

6:00PM (2hrs), FREE ADMISSION

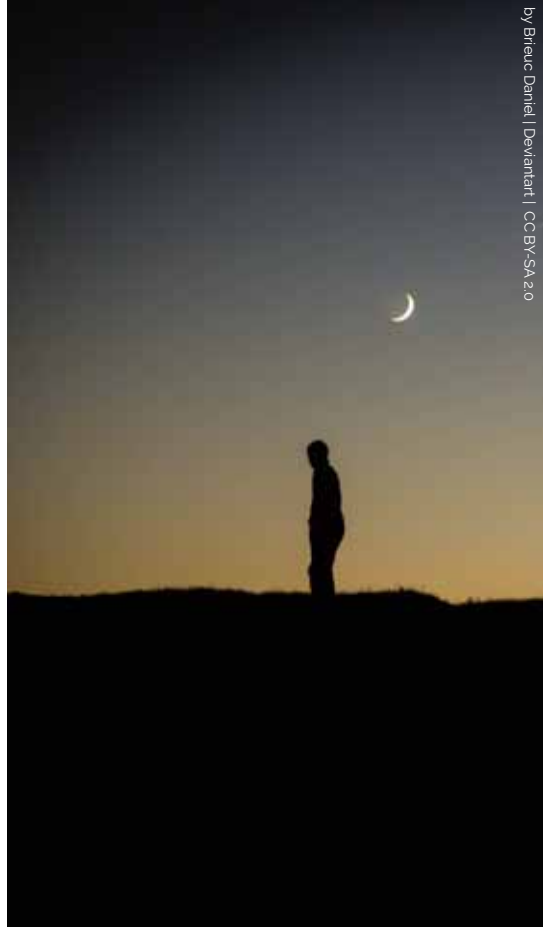
"Look deep into nature and then you will understand everything better," said Albert Einstein. It is suggested that Nature is governed by Laws that can be recognized through the infinite patterns that appear on her canvas. Join us as we understand how the wondrous geometry of nature might give us a glimpse into the inner workings of our own existence.



## SPIRITUAL LEGACY OF ANCIENT EGYPT

Lecture @ **Khar**  
**Saturday, 6th August 2016**  
 6:00PM (2hrs), FREE ADMISSION

Ancient Egypt has served as a source of wonder and mystery for countless explorers and philosophers. How were they able to impact humanity with such permanence and magnitude? Join us as we draw inspiration for the renewal of ourselves and of society today.



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## LESSONS FOR LIFE FROM THE LITTLE PRINCE

Philosophy Cafe @ **Colaba (Main Centre)**  
**Saturday, 20th August 2016**  
 6:00PM (2hrs), FREE ADMISSION

"It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye." Join us for a discussion and book reading of Saint- Exupery's timeless classic *The Little Prince*, as the little wise boy from Asteroid B-612 helps us better understand concepts of love, friendship, responsibility and the art of letting go.

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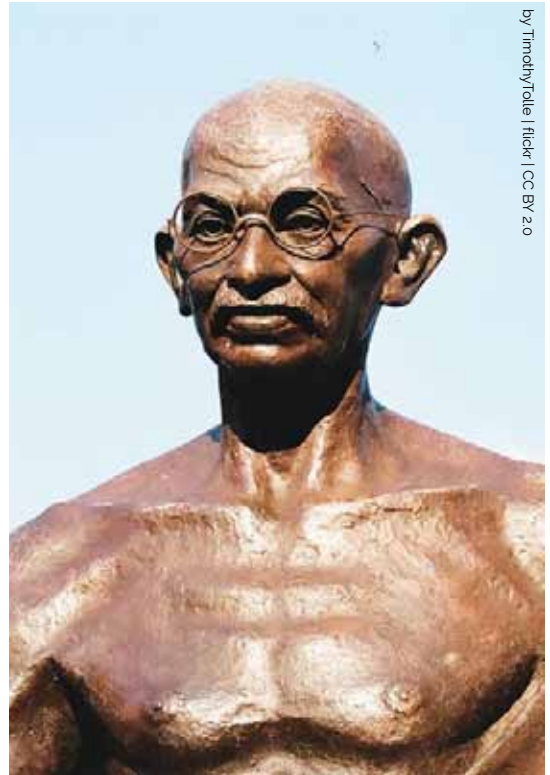
## BUDDHA'S PATH OF HAPPINESS

Lecture @ Khar

**Saturday, 20th August 2016**

6:00PM (2hrs), FREE ADMISSION

Buddha talks of Life as Suffering. But is suffering the only vehicle towards consciousness? Perhaps it is our attitude towards life's challenges that results in our misery. Join us as we investigate Buddha's teachings as a path that can allow us to lead a happier and more meaningful life.



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## BE THE CHANGE: KEY TO TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Lecture @ Khar

**Saturday, 24th September 2016**

6:00PM (2hrs), FREE ADMISSION

*"New leadership is needed for new times, but it will not come from finding new and more wily ways to manipulate the external world. It will come as we who lead find the courage to take an inward journey toward both our shadow and our light, a journey that, faithfully pursued, will take us beyond ourselves to become healers of a wounded world."* —Parker J. Palmer. A leader leads by example in every aspect of life, often without ever choosing to lead, but perhaps this is the only sustainable way to improve our lives.



## LIFE, LIBERTY AND THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

Lecture @ Colaba (Main Centre)

**Saturday, 24th September 2016**

6:00PM (2hrs), FREE ADMISSION

Although bound to slavery, Epictetus is ironically celebrated as the freest man in all of Rome. And yet it feels as though both liberty and happiness elude us today. What does it truly mean to Live? What is the source of Liberty and Happiness?



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