

OCT - DEC 2016

THE ACROPOLITAN

A Magazine on Philosophy, Culture & Volunteering

FEATURE

DO ANIMALS HAVE SOULS?

IN SEARCH FOR UNITY

VOLUNTEERING FOR TRUE CHANGE

SOIL, SOUL, SOCIETY
RENDEZVOUS WITH SATISH KUMAR

EDUCATION, TO WHAT END?

SCHEDULE OF PUBLIC EVENTS

Celebrating 10 Years in India


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 Acropolitian Magazine serves as a tribute to every citizen yearning for these higher principles in all aspects of Life: **Truth, Beauty, Justice, Goodness.**



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.



FROM THE EDITORIAL DESK

Dear Reader,

On 2nd November 2016, New Acropolis Cultural Organization joyously celebrates its 10th Anniversary in India. This milestone marks ten years of a special philosophical fraternity, collectively devoted to building a new and better Humanity for a new and better World.

Humanity has gathered a vast treasure through her past, embedded in the astounding diversity of languages, cultures, and religions that have emerged from her unwavering yearning to discover her role in the cosmic order of Life. The value of this treasure can only really be appreciated, however, through our ability to grasp the shared aspiration for Truth that fundamentally unites the seemingly unrelated traditions of our past.

To do so, we must learn the language of the Soul, its chief attribute: Harmony – amongst individuals in Society, with the Soil that nurtures us, and within every human being, harmonizing actions with the voice of one's own conscience. Through education, and through the true spirit of volunteering, we might revive these principles, and experience once again the Unity of our essence. We must but start this adventure. For after all, "The journey of a thousand miles, begins with the first step." (Lau Tzu).

The Editorial Team

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IN SEARCH OF UNITY

BY YARON BARZILAY



By investigating some ancient traditions from various places and various historical periods, it appears that the suggested path of man's development is synonymous with the principle of Unity. The search for Truth, a higher reality, has often been presented as an ability to overcome the illusion of separation which causes man to act in contradiction with his own true nature as an integral part of the universe.

The cosmogenesis and cosmographic teachings of civilizations like Ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, Greece, India and the Pre-Columbian cultures, to name but a few, share some common fundamental principles. This does not eliminate the value of each tradition's uniqueness and points of view. Instead, it may offer us most valuable perspectives, to conduct our own indispensable investigation. Observing the fundamental similarities between various traditions requires great attention, as it may reflect the common truth they were all able to connect with, or perhaps even suggest a common origin of their knowledge. The constitution of man, and the universe as a whole, has often been described as a mysterious combination of an eternal reality and a transient reality. Man is seen as a reflection of the whole, a microcosm of the cosmos, fundamentally governed by the same laws of nature.

Several mythologies and associated ancient teachings, describe the process of creation as a process of limiting the unlimited, by giving it shape and borders, a transition from the formless (in India known as the *Arupa*) to form (*Rupa*). The unlimited ocean full with all of life's potential (like the *Nun* of the Ancient Egyptians) gives birth to the first island from which creation emerges. The process of creation has also often been paradoxically described as the transition from the one to the many, from unity which expands to multiplicity, without ever losing its original oneness.

Man is seen as a reflection of the whole, a microcosm of the cosmos, fundamentally governed by the same laws of nature.

Several schools of thought in ancient Greece, India and Rome, to name only a few, speak of the cosmos as a macro being, one life, of which man, whether or not he is aware of it, is an integral part. Man's own development is therefore a reverse voyage from the multiplicity and separation, back to the unity of life.

This voyage of consciousness is often symbolised by an ascent to a unifying point: the peak of a mountain, the centre of a mandala, or the axis of a pyramid. It is a spiritual voyage that takes us inward and upward, from the many to the one, eliminating the web of illusion that allows us to see only a fraction of reality, consisting only of the segregated and separated. It is a voyage that, symbolically or not, marks the death of the separate identity and re-birth to a new identity, the drop that returns to the ocean of which it has always been a part, although not very aware of it. Hindus speak of *Yoga* as a path of unity with oneself, with the teachings, and fundamentally with Life itself (*Prana Jiva*).

Man's awakening to the unity of life is therefore a transformation from mortality to immortality, from ignorance to true knowledge, and if we understand Truth as synonymous to the totality of reality, to the one life that is the universe itself.

Our modern perspective is accustomed to segregating everything, each element of life by itself, separating each from the whole. It is as though we isolate a leaf from a branch, forgetting the existence of the tree as a whole, or even the whole forest of which it is a part; not as a sum of its parts, but as an entity in itself!

This remarkable possibility is exactly what many ancient traditions suggest. If their observations were right, time cannot make dim their teachings; they are as vital to us today as they have always been.

Our ancestors may have had very little understanding of the great knowledge and technological development of our times, but if they were right in their fundamental observation of life, they had a definite advantage of knowing the essential!

Put simply, to know how to survive in this world well, how to enrich it with comfort and health, but to forget the WHY of life, doesn't really make much sense.

The search for unity encompasses several key principles; one being the search for Truth, or Wisdom. What is truthful must also correlate with a global view of life. A partial observation, unlinked to the whole, inevitably leads to a false understanding of reality and un-sustainability. "Only truth triumphs!" whisper the texts of antiquity, reminding us that what is not aligned with truth will not sustain. We may add to this, "That which remains separate, will eventually perish."

In unity with life we shall find justice, as suggested by the great Stoic philosopher, Marcus Aurelius: "That which is not good for the beehive cannot be good for the bees." If the individual is ultimately a part of a greater life, how can his own good contradict the good of the whole? On the contrary, that which separates us from the whole is the prime cause of unjust deeds, and their unethical motives. The ethical way of life must be the result of one's own consciousness and identity. Between being 'part of everything' versus 'separate from anything', emerge completely different roads leading to different thoughts and actions.

Establishing unity is to build a great Harmony with life, within and without, to revive the hidden link between the smallest and the largest, the drop and the ocean, as one.

We speak so much today of the need to find a sustainable way of living with Nature, an ecological system that would preserve the essential natural balance that ultimately supports our own life as well. Many care for nature and dedicate their time to find solutions to this great challenge of our times. Recent approaches seem to come close to those of antiquity; seeing the world as an integrated living organism that depends on the balance and harmonious contribution of all the kingdoms of life.

But ultimately, the knowledge of our environment, which is ecology, depends on man's level of consciousness and his prime identity.

How can man protect nature if he forgets that he is essentially an integral part of nature? If he is blind to the fact that he is a non-separate part of nature, is he not bound to damage his environment, no matter how good his intentions may be?

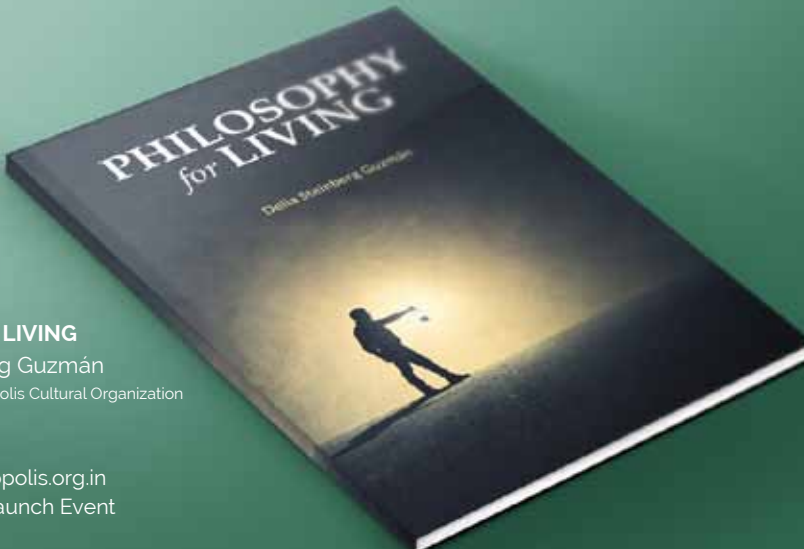
The search for unity takes the individual beyond the realm of time, beyond the false borders of mortality. It follows the ancient schools of thought by resonating with the idea that man is an eternal soul, simply wearing different masks through time, but is ultimately defined by an inner entity, beyond the realm of temporary appearance. The Individual self, as seen by the ancient Greeks, is the inseparable part of man. It is exactly there that the mysterious link may be found - within man himself, within his inner world - the doors that connect him with the whole can be opened wide. A mysterious connection between the subjective

and the objective is suggested, where the illusions of separation can be shed and a True Fraternity can be formed; a Fraternity of all men and women, and with all other forms of life. Such a wonder that within us, by paying attention to our inner world, we can unite with the universe around!

Establishing unity is to build a great Harmony with life, within and without, to revive the hidden link between the smallest and the largest, the drop and the ocean, as one.

There inside, by stepping on the tips of our toes, may we humbly catch a glimpse of the truth that life is always one. There we may find the bond with those who speak of great Beauty, the great thinkers and artists; with profound love they write their timeless poetry, using words and sounds. We can echo their hearts as we observe the same incredible life they were enchanted by, because ultimately we are, and always have been, ONE. ★★★

Yaron Bazilay is the National Director of New Acropolis Cultural Organization, India.



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"Delia Steinberg has managed to distil the best teachings from the universal history of philosophy which she knows so well." - María Dolores Fernández-Figares

LIVING TOGETHER IN HARMONY

BY DELIA STEINBERG GUZMÁN

Excerpt from *Philosophy For Living* published in English by New Acropolis Cultural Organization, India.

Those who are incapable of living in harmony with others are also incapable of living in harmony with themselves.

What they can't achieve when working with others they won't achieve for themselves either.

- Delia Steinberg Guzmán

Human unity

It is our conviction that the human soul is essentially one, so we cannot establish distinctions based on the external appearance of people and things. It is rather a question of working for the development and expression of the soul, which often lies dormant when incarnated in bodies that are attracted to or repelled by one another according to the circumstances.

Against disunity: trust

The word "unify" comes from the Latin *unus* and *facere*, meaning "to make one"; that is, to bring together several different but coherent parts and combine them to achieve a harmonious and homogeneous unity. It is an act of coming together, of connection. If this connection didn't exist, each part or each being would follow a different path, which is not a bad thing in itself - except that they would be divided, disunited and in opposition

to one another. Without this movement towards unification, we would live in perpetual chaos and it would be very difficult to find meaning in life and its changing circumstances.

Indeed, the disease that is threatening to tear apart our present age of history - a disease that we have been carrying for quite some time in a latent state - is precisely separatism, dismemberment, an open struggle between increasingly smaller factions, which inevitably ends in conflicts between individuals. We are living this every day in the sphere of politics, culture, religion and art, and in social and family settings; we can see it on the streets of the big cities and its impact is already being felt in small towns and villages. Mistrust is the lord and master of all, resulting in rudeness, abruptness, irritability, unscrupulousness, insincerity and selfishness.

A good dose of unification is what we all need in general and each of us in particular. It would help us to experience once again the sense of being part of that big family which is humanity, the happiness of friendship, of mutual trust, of the desire to cooperate and help, of being able to look each other in the eye again and find shining truths instead of fearful shadows.

Philosophical friendship

What we need and want to recover – because we know that it has never ceased to exist – is philosophical friendship; that friendship which is based on a mutual love of knowledge, which can withstand time and difficulties, which creates bonds of true fraternity even when there are no blood ties involved.

That is why we define this kind of friendship as philosophical, even if we may not use that term in everyday life. It is philosophical because there is love and a need for knowledge. It is what makes two or more people try to get to know one another, understand one another, beginning by getting to know themselves. It is the friendship that leads to the birth of respect, patience and constancy, that forgives without failing to point out mistakes and encourages each of us to become a little better every day in order to be worthy of our friend. It is the friendship that awakens a sense of solidarity, of mutual support at all times, that is able to bear separation and sorrow, sickness and hardship.

We define it as philosophical because it is only when we share ideas in common, similar goals in life and an identical spirit of service and self-improvement, that this friendship, which is not a plant of one day or a passing summer cloud, can be born.

Tolerance

Tolerance is indispensable among all human beings; it goes beyond superficial differences and instead is based on the deep qualities of the human being, who is the same in all places, in all physical bodies and under the most varied expressions of existence.

Living in harmony with others begins with ourselves

It's not easy to separate what the body wants from what the emotions demand or what our reason – which is not always clear or constant – requires of us.

However, this agreement between the constituent factors of our personality is indispensable. It is an essential formula for finding harmony within

ourselves, which in turn will allow us to develop that cherished harmony with others.

Peace is the result of neutralizing our defects by the strength of our virtues, reducing our negative aspects and allowing space for the potential of the positive but latent aspects to emerge.

Bringing peace into our lives

Peace is the result of neutralizing our defects by the strength of our virtues, reducing our negative aspects and allowing space for the potential of the positive but latent aspects to emerge.

It is peace with oneself and with others.

It is the peace of harmonious coexistence, of concord.

These are the peaceful victories we can obtain every day, without getting angry with ourselves or with others.

Sharing who we are

It is not possible to live in harmony with others if the generosity of love is lacking and the all-absorbing sense of being unique in the world prevails.

If we are to live together in harmony we need to expand our consciousness and allow space for all living beings, we need to understand the life that is in all things and perceive the infinity of the universe. We need to know and appreciate everything that exists... And have the courage to share who we are with everyone around us.

No one can achieve their own fulfilment if they have no regard for the fulfilment of others. ★★★

Delia Steinberg Guzmán is the International President of International Organization New Acropolis.

VOLUNTEERING FOR TRUE CHANGE

BY TRISHYA SCREWVALA



New Acropolis Volunteers engaged in a city beautification project in Colaba, Mumbai.

Winston Churchill famously said, "We make a living by what we get but we make a life by what we give". When we speak of volunteering today, we often think of people who have "more", an abundance of knowledge or resources, sharing with those who we consider to have "less". However, if we look at volunteering merely from this exoteric perspective, we miss out on the very essence of what it means to volunteer. True giving has the potential to go far beyond the physical act of providing.

Today, most of us recognize the need to bring about a change in our world, however, we may feel helpless when faced with the sheer enormity of the issues staring at us, or might even consider it someone else's responsibility to address. We look to local government bodies to improve our cities' infrastructure and cleanliness, or to our Prime Minister to solve socio-economic inequalities. But rarely do we look inwards and recognize the need to change ourselves. Can we really enforce change around us in a sustainable manner unless it comes from within?

In India alone, we have close to 3.1 million registered Non Government Organizations (NGOs), of which

many are taking significant steps in addressing critical issues. (1) The number of people worldwide donating money to NGOs has increased from 1.2 billion in 2011 to 1.4 billion in 2014, and nearly one in three people has donated to charitable causes in 2015 while one in four has volunteered. (2)

We continue to look for external solutions, without realizing that unless we initiate change within ourselves, no level of interventions from organisations can sustainably address the problems we face.

Despite the scale of these efforts, however, we are yet to bring about the change we are looking for. An alarming 1 billion people continue to live in extreme poverty (earning under \$1.90 per day) across the world. (3) One in ten people still lack access to safe water, and one in three people lack access to a toilet. (4) As our population continues

to expand, are we really able to positively impact human life?

The beauty of volunteering lies in the discovery that it is not actually about “giving” at all. How can we “give” to something that is inherently “us”?

We continue to look for external solutions, without realizing that unless we initiate change within ourselves, no level of interventions from organisations can sustainably address the problems we face. After all, isn't it us, as individuals, that collectively create these very organisations, that we hope will miraculously change our world? Lao Tzu recognized this profound principle of life when he wrote, “If there is to be peace in the world, there must be peace in the nations. If there is to be peace in the nations, there must be peace in the cities. If there is to be peace in the cities, there must be peace between neighbors. If there is to be peace between neighbors, there must be peace in the home. If there is to be peace in the home, there must be peace in the heart.”

Volunteering can be defined as choosing to act in recognition of a need, with an attitude of social responsibility and without concern for monetary profit. (5) Perhaps the beauty of volunteering lies in the discovery that it is not actually about “giving” at all. How can we “give” to something that is inherently “us”? Are we not ourselves an integral part of our society, our nation, indeed our universe?

Einstein illustrates our interconnectedness with society: “The whole of our actions and desires are bound up with the existence of other human beings. We eat food that others have grown, wear clothes that others have made, live in houses that others have built. The greater part of our knowledge and

beliefs has been communicated to us by other people through the medium of a language which others have created. The individual, if left alone from birth would remain primitive and beast-like in his thoughts and feelings to a degree that we can hardly conceive. The individual is what he is and has the significance that he has not so much in virtue of his individuality, but rather as a member of a great human society, which directs his material and spiritual existence from the cradle to the grave.”



Acropolitans initiating the clean up of the Ban Ganga Water Tank, a heritage landmark in Mumbai.

Fostering the spirit of volunteering is a wonderful opportunity to put our personal desires aside, for something much larger than ourselves. It can be one of the most powerful tools for self-transformation, empowering us to take responsibility for our surroundings, while actively partaking as citizens. It is philosophy in action, allowing us to practice innate human virtues like generosity and justice. And doing for others causes us to think of our own selves less. In fact volunteering is an expression of our humanity, an act of will, allowing us to act with deliberate intention, as a master rather than a slave of the animalistic calls of the personality.



Without ever expecting anything in return, the sun emanates light, energy, warmth and holds the entire solar system together. And it does so persistently, rising and setting, day after day tirelessly.

In Plato's allegory of the cave, the spirit of volunteering is captured by the man who, having seen the light of the Sun, returns into the cave to fulfill his duty by sharing his realization with others, despite the difficulties involved. "When I let go of who I am, I become what I might be," said Lao Tzu and this is where the incredible potential for growth and transformation lies. Perhaps this is what it really means to be human. And if such action can inspire others, perhaps this is what can enable real and sustainable change.

Therefore, volunteering is not as much about giving, as much as it is an attitude of service that we can practice at every moment in our lives. It is

evident that this principle of service resonates with the natural order of life around us. Without ever expecting anything in return, the sun emanates light, energy, warmth and holds the entire solar system together. And it does so persistently, rising and setting, day after day tirelessly. As human beings, perhaps we too have a specific service to offer, not just to humanity, but to life. The true spirit of volunteering is to discover and fulfill that purpose, to align our personal wants with the greater needs around us. It is the recognition that the external is but a reflection of the internal. And hence internal change is the only sustainable way to create transformation. ★★★

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DO ANIMALS HAVE SOULS?

BY JULIAN SCOTT

Different people may have different reasons for asking this question: some may want to know if they will meet up with their pet in the next world; others may be interested in the psychic powers of animals; others may be concerned at the inhumane way we treat animals nowadays; and others may wonder whether or not we should eat animals or become vegetarians. All of these questions will be affected by the way we answer the question: "Do animals have souls?"

The existence of the soul (whether animal or human) cannot be either proven or disproven from an objective point of view, because by its nature it is something immaterial and intangible, and therefore not subject to objective verification. Apart from relying on our intuition, all we can do is look at the ideas found on the subject in the philosophies and religions of the world and contrast them with the prevailing belief that the soul does not exist.

A common idea in many traditions is that of the World-Soul, in Latin this was called "Anima Mundi", from which we can see that the very word "Animal" comes from the Latin word for Soul. The World Soul is an invisible living being which animates the whole of creation. It is like an intermediary between God (also

called Spirit) and Matter. One Roman philosopher (Plotinus) explains the relation between Soul and Matter with an image: Matter is like liquid sealing wax and Soul is like a seal, which impresses it with a living idea. Matter, on its own, is a mere formless substance waiting to be given life and form, which comes from Soul. Without Soul then, the world and all its creatures could not possibly exist.

In this way, there is no such thing as an inanimate (in-animate = "soul-less") object. Everything is pervaded with Soul, even a stone, water, fire, the air. Everything is alive.

Not only this, but also everything in Nature is in some way intelligent and has some form of consciousness. Seeds do not grow blindly into trees, but follow a predetermined plan which is capable of adapting to their environment. Flowers respond to the sun, rhythms, and even (so gardeners say) to the words and intentions of humans. Molecules behave in an organised way – if they didn't everything would fall apart – not to mention the highly organised behaviour of ants and bees. All of this implies a high degree of intelligence. It may be objected that trees, flowers and animals are just following automatic, instinctive patterns, programmed into them by evolution or nature. On the other hand,

the same could be said of us in many cases. How often do we not just react instinctively to situations, instead of freely choosing our acts independently of our conditioning? We are all souls, with varying degrees of freedom and consciousness.

In traditional cultures, mountains, for example, are regarded as great living beings, spirits to be venerated. Stones and precious metals have soul and consequently special powers for magic and healing. They are channels for powerful invisible forces. The earth itself is the body of a great soul, and all the beings of the earth are a part of that great being, the children of a benevolent mother. Only now, because we have stopped believing in Soul, have we become capable of poisoning our own mother, the earth.

Animals, too, are souls; and, like all of us on this earth, they are evolving towards higher levels of consciousness, towards the conscious reunification with the Great Universal Spirit, or 'God'. There is a poem by the Sufi mystic, Rumi, which describes the esoteric doctrine of evolution. It goes as follows:

I died as mineral and became a plant,
I died as plant and rose to animal,
I died as animal and I was Man.
Why should I fear? When was I less by dying?
Yet once more I shall die as Man, to soar
With angels blest; but even from angelhood
I must pass on: all except God doth perish.
When I have sacrificed my angel-soul,
I shall become what no mind e'er conceived.
Oh, let me not exist! For non-existence
proclaims in organ tones: "To him we shall return".

The gist of it is that, over untold aeons, Man has evolved through the mineral, vegetable and animal kingdoms, is now in the human and in the future will continue to evolve to other, higher levels. The same will logically be true of other beings. Thus, the souls of minerals will one day evolve into plants, these into animals and these into humans. And after they have completed the human stage, the souls which are now

animals will then become gods. If this is the truth of the matter, then it is evident that animals have souls.

The earth itself is the body of a great soul, and all the beings of the earth are a part of that great being, the children of a benevolent mother. Only now, because we have stopped believing in Soul, have we become capable of poisoning our own mother, the earth.

This is the traditional belief – pre-Christian and pre-Cartesian. But already in the fourth century of the Christian era, the theologian St. John Chrysostom labelled the belief that animals could have souls as deeply heretical. The most famous theologian of the Middle Ages, St. Thomas Aquinas, did allow animals souls, but denied that they could be immortal. But, if soul is an immaterial being, and therefore not subject to death, why should it not be immortal?

Here, esoteric philosophy can come to our aid, with its idea of the Group Soul of animals. This is the idea that, generally speaking (with possible exceptions), in the three lower kingdoms of nature souls are not individualised. There are only group souls which, with the progress of evolution, become increasingly sub-divided. So, for example, there would be a group soul of each species of moth, a group soul of Bengal tigers and brown bears, etc. The animals of these species or sub-species would be sent out by their respective group souls and, when they die physically, their souls would return to the group and be merged back into it, losing the temporary individuality that they had. In this way, all the experiences that the individual animal has are input into the consciousness of this group soul and instantly transmitted to the whole of its being. The

next animals of that species to be born will then be born with the new information already incorporated. An image that has been used to describe this process in Theosophical literature is that of a bucket of water from which glassfuls are taken out and slightly coloured with a dye; when the glassful is returned to the bucket, all the water in the bucket is coloured by the addition, and the water that was previously contained in the glass becomes inseparable from the water in the bucket. Its separate identity was only given by the glass that contained it.

The concept of a group soul is a widespread belief among many traditional peoples, as the following extract from the Encyclopedia Britannica tells us: " 'Master of the animals' i.e. the group soul in some traditions is believed to be the ruler of the forest and guardian of all animals; in others, he is the ruler of only one species... A complex system of customs governs the relationship between the master of the animals, the game animal, and the hunter. The master controls the game animals or their spirits (in many myths, by penning them). He releases a certain number to man as food. Only the allotted number may be killed, and the slain animal must be treated with respect... The souls of the animals, when slain, return to the master's pen and give him a report of their treatment. If this system is violated, the master will avenge an animal improperly slain, usually by withholding game. A ceremony must then be held to remove the offence..." The 'master of the animals' is either pictured in human form, or as having animal attributes, or riding an animal, or as a giant animal.

From a scientific point of view, the notion of the group soul could solve a number of enigmas. For example, what is the intelligence that enables natural selection to take place over a relatively short space of time? A century ago, the British Peppered Moth was light-coloured throughout its range. But now it has become dark-coloured in polluted, industrial regions, while remaining light-coloured

in rural areas, showing that it has intelligently adapted to blend in with different environments in order to avoid its predators. It implies the existence of a central intelligence (the group soul) which is receiving information from the members of its species and adapting accordingly. Another example given by the biologist Rupert Sheldrake is of some rats which were taught a task and gradually got better at it through practice. The same task was then given to another group of rats on the other side of the world some years later, and they learnt the task more quickly than the first rats had, implying that the knowledge of the first rats had somehow been imparted to them.



The idea of the group soul also holds the key to the difference between human beings and animals. Animals, on the whole, do not have a distinct sense of self. For example, if presented with their own image in a mirror, they generally react to it as if it were another animal. Humans, on the other hand, can recognise themselves as separate psychological entities from a very early age. And this would tally with the esoteric teaching that human souls are individualised, so that when we die, we do not lose our soul-individuality by being merged back into the soul of our group, but continue to exist, and to reincarnate, as individual souls. Animals, for the most part, are only temporarily separate from their group souls, although, with the progress of evolution, they will gradually begin to individualise until they reach the human level of evolution.

There are some exceptions, however. Since not all animals are at the same level of evolution, but some are more advanced than others, there are some animals which are already becoming individualised. These are, according to esoteric teachings, the ones which have been domesticated by man, such as cats, dogs, horses, elephants and apes (the latter being a special case too complex to go into here). Dolphins may be another case, since not only do they show signs of advanced intelligence and consciousness, but there are also references in some ancient works, such as the Vedas from India, which say that they were once domesticated by man. The idea is that, through their contact with human beings, these animals take on some of our characteristics and can be helped in their evolution towards self-consciousness.

Thus, in the 'mirror test', some animals, like chimpanzees and dolphins, are capable of learning that it is their own reflection they are looking at. Others, like dogs, do not do so, because their relationship with the world is not primarily visual but olfactory.

Elephants have a sense of mortality, not only of their own, but also that of others. When they discover the remains of one of their companions they examine the bones delicately with their trunk, show that they feel deeply affected by the vision and even seem to try and identify the deceased. Only after a long time in this solemn attitude do they leave the place.

According to the esoteric teachings from the East which we have studied in some of our courses, the consciousness of animals is mainly emotional, while that of humans is mainly mental. This should be clarified by stating that, in esoterism, mind is divided into a lower, selfish mind, and a higher, altruistic mind. The general level that human beings are said to be on at present is that of the lower mind.

However, it is obvious that we also have higher aspirations, and while history perhaps shows humanity to be predominantly selfish, there is a

vast literature exhorting us to be unselfish and a few exceptional human beings who actually achieve such unselfishness. The reason for this is that, within our general level of 'lower-mental consciousness', we are also developing 'higher-mental' elements, especially the more spiritually advanced members of humanity.

Nature is beautiful in all of its expressions: the hardness or brilliance of a mineral, the purity and energy of a plant, the skill and grace of an animal, the ingenuity of humanity and its heroic struggle. All of these qualities are expressions of Soul.

So, when we say that animals are primarily developing 'emotional' consciousness, this does not preclude them from being capable of thought, imagination or other characteristics of a more mental nature. For example, while most animals are not very good at counting (which involves classifying things into groups, a mental activity), and the general limit for most animals is the number four, ravens have been known to be able to count up to seven. Termites, which, like ants and bees, live in highly organised societies, are capable of building arches and adapting their building activities to their environment. In other words, they seem to have in their consciousness a plan of the building they are attempting to construct. However, these do not appear to be individual abilities, since if the Queen of the colony dies, the whole society collapses and all the individual termites become immediately confused.

Precisely because the general nature of the animal soul is emotional – or 'astral' as it is known in esoteric language – animals have a general psychic ability which we humans have lost due to the development of our predominantly mental characteristics. There

are many fascinating examples of the psychic powers of animals, such as the ability to foresee earthquakes long before they happen, the ability of pets to tune into their owners' minds and to know when they are about to leave their office to come home, or the 'homing instinct' of certain animals and birds. A case is cited by Rupert Sheldrake of a dog which was lost in America while the family was on holiday and managed to find its way home – 2,000 miles away – several months later! The earthquake prediction capability of animals is so evident – they can be seen panicking and trying desperately to run away several hours before an earthquake happens – that their behaviour has been used to avert major catastrophes in China and elsewhere. Due to the general scepticism, however, this resource is not fully utilised all over the world.

It goes without saying that, since they are evolving predominantly on the emotional level, animals do have feelings! Their feelings may be more or less refined, depending on their evolutionary level. In the same way that human beings are not all at the same level of spiritual evolution, but some are highly advanced and others very undeveloped, so it is with animals. A worm is far less developed than a cobra. A dolphin has almost human qualities, as do many dogs. People who have swum with dolphins say that they have the feeling that the dolphins understand exactly how they feel and this gives them a wonderful feeling of being understood and accepted. Many people have had the same experience with dogs, who will comfort them when they are sad, for example. There is a huge range and variety of levels of being within all the kingdoms of nature.

In view of their capacity for feeling, we should really reconsider the way we treat animals, and especially the way that dogs, cats and monkeys are used in animal experiments, as if they were incapable of feelings.

The whole idea of animal experiments, vivisection, factory farming and other such modern-day

aberrations, can be traced back to the ideas of René Descartes, the 17th century philosopher whose most famous phrase is "I think therefore I am". Quoting once again from the Encyclopedia Britannica: "If St. Francis of Assisi was the greatest friend of animals, René Descartes, the French philosopher, was perhaps their greatest enemy. He believed that animals had no souls and that, as thinking and feeling processes in his view were part of the soul, animals could feel no pain".

In turn, Descartes' thinking arises partly from Christian theology's simplification of the broader ideas of Greek philosophy. Plato, for example, considered that there were several expressions of soul – a vegetative soul, an animal soul and a rational soul; and the alchemists also believed in a mineral soul. But when Christianity came along it simplified this and said that only the human being has a soul. A theological error with tragic consequences.



The Encyclopedia Britannica continues: "Further, Descartes concluded that animals were mere machines... 'mechanical robots', as he and his followers called them". In the 18th century, horrible demonstrations were common, in which 'scientists' would tie up an animal and stick sharp instruments into different parts of its anatomy, coldly explaining that its cries of agony were merely 'reflex reactions.' There is a painting in the National Gallery from that era, where a beautiful bird is shown in a glass chamber from which the air is being gradually

extracted, in order to demonstrate how living creatures cannot survive without oxygen – as if that were not obvious anyway, without such cruelty! The painting is entitled 'The scientific experiment'.

By contrast, the esoteric and traditional idea, as we have seen, is that all beings, right down to minerals, have souls and are alive. The implication of this is that the whole of nature should be treated with respect and courtesy. The important thing, I believe, is to grasp the concept of the evolving soul. The world-soul manifests itself in different levels of being, in order to develop certain qualities. It manifests itself in minerals, in plants, in animals, in humans, in angels, nature spirits, gods... For example, a young child may appear to be less intelligent than an adult because it has not yet developed rational thought. But the child is a soul which may be more highly developed than its physical parents. We should not judge by the outer appearance. Think of a stone: it is a soul, which is at present restricted to a relatively static body. In the future, it will become a plant, an animal, a man, a god... Or think of a human being: at present, most of us are terribly limited by our fears, our worries, our insatiable desires. But imagine a time in the future when we will be entirely free from fear, greed, envy, worry, and full of never-ending love for everyone.

It is a question of seeing the potential in every being, on the one hand, and also of seeing the beauty of each soul expression in its present state. For nature is beautiful in all of its expressions: the hardness or brilliance of a mineral, the purity and energy of a plant, the skill and grace of an animal, the ingenuity of humanity and its heroic struggle. All of these qualities are expressions of Soul, which is present in everything, from the tiniest particle to the largest galaxy.

How, then, should we treat animals, our younger brothers and sisters on the evolutionary path? With the same respect as we should treat all beings, including each other. The problem is that we don't

even have that respect for each other, or for the environment, and this is largely due to the progressive 'de-souling' of the world, which has been going on now for many centuries. The first step towards regaining this respect is to understand that the whole world is an expression of Soul and therefore is sacred and worthy of reverence and respect.

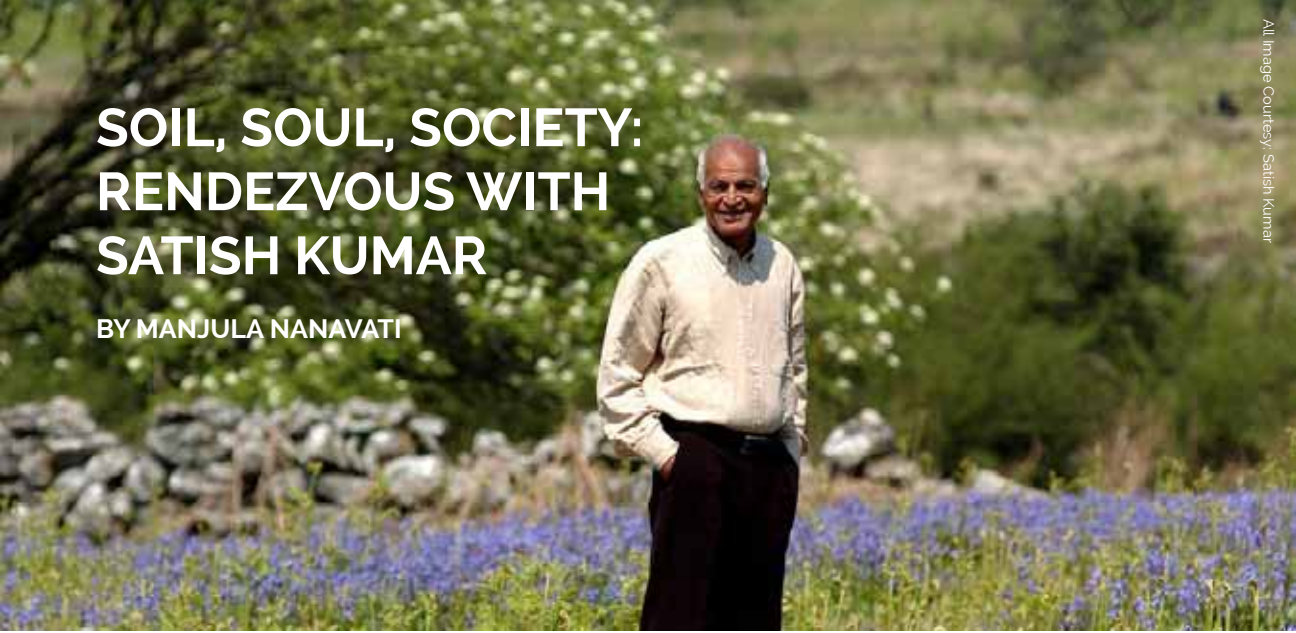
We can see how people in traditional societies treated animals, particularly those societies which lived close to nature, like the Celts or the native American Indians. In hunting societies, for example, when an animal is killed, its body is treated with reverence. Even some European hunters today continue this respect for the dead animals. I have seen with my own eyes a dead deer being carried by a hunter in Austria, which had a sprig of larch placed in its mouth. I was told that this was a blessing for the soul of the animal. In Canada, the Quebec Indians used to take a purifying sweat bath before departing on the hunt and made an offering of tobacco to a bear that had been killed. Afterwards the people feasted and danced in its honour.

The Celts may have fished for salmon and hunted wild boar, but their mythology is full of magical stories about these creatures which show a deep respect for their qualities and they even used them as symbols. The salmon, for example, is a symbol of the migration of the Soul to its spiritual home, and consequently of a deep inner wisdom and intuition, as well as a wonderful determination to overcome all obstacles in pursuit of a goal. The wild boar symbolises, amongst other things, the fearless and fierce courage of the warrior.

To change the way we collectively treat animals requires a change in the way we think about them, in fact a change in the way we see the world as a whole. "Esoteric" Philosophy, which is in fact a natural philosophy, could be the beginning of a 'new', or rather, timeless way of thinking, which can help us to recover a sense of love and respect for all creatures, great and small. ★★★

SOIL, SOUL, SOCIETY: RENDEZVOUS WITH SATISH KUMAR

BY MANJULA NANAVATI



Activist, Author, Environmentalist, Academic, Humanist, Visionary. Satish Kumar believes that the spiritual aspect of our ecosystem has been lost in modern environmental debates, and has been replaced by systemic violence; towards the land, animals, mankind, and even towards ourselves. He maintains that reverence for nature is the only thread that can mend and weave together the fabric of humanity.

In pursuit of this ideal he has campaigned for land reform, and has walked from India to the four capitals of the nuclear world as a Pilgrimage for Peace. He has appeared on radio, television and a variety of public forums, speaking and writing tirelessly to raise our collective consciousness. He is the longest serving editor of any magazine in the world; Resurgence Magazine is a testament to his deep commitment to foster ethical living and environmental awareness. In 1990 he co-founded Schumacher College, internationally respected for its practical emphasis on a holistic ecological worldview. Additionally, he serves on the advisory board of Our Future Planet, an online community agitating for change.

Based on his book, *You Are, Therefore I Am*, The Acropolitian explores the impetus and insight of this spirited man of action. Here are excerpts from our conversation.

So there is no separation between the world and the divine. When you act with divine motivation, all your actions become Dharma.

The Acropolitian (TA): In your book you say “I wanted to practice Dharma in the world, not pretend to be outside of it...for renouncing the world is a contradiction.” Can you explain that?

Satish ji: We don't have to go to the mountains, caves or monasteries and forsake the world. Only a few people can do this - and it would make spirituality something that only the elite can practice. What I'm saying in the book is, Dharma should be for everybody and should be every day.

The Upanishads say *ishavasya vidhi sharma* which means “everything in the world is imbued with the

divine spirit." So there is no separation between the world and the divine. When you act with divine motivation, all your actions become Dharma. For example, when you conduct business, is your motivation profit or is it to serve the community? For Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela, politics was not for ego, power, or control. It was in the service of humanity. The moment your motivation changes, politics becomes spiritual work.

Whatever you do, gardening, cooking, farming, education, or medicine, taking a salary should be the by-product; not the end product. If we do everything with the intention to serve, to be compassionate and kind, then even in our ordinary everyday activities we practice Dharma



TA: But if one's own conscience is the only compass to judge the drive of right motivation, isn't it possible to get caught up in the fantasy of our own ego? How do we discern between the two.

Satish ji: I think we have to meditate every day. And in our meditation we have to ask that question to ourselves: Who am I? If you ask your inner voice in your silence: Am I doing this action for my ego, prestige, recognition or money? You will get an honest answer from deep within your soul because the inner voice will not lie. And if the inner voice directs it, you have to undertake a new way of thinking, a transformation, and growth. But

only you are the judge of that, and only you can decide if your actions emerge from dharma, or from ego.

Taking a salary should be the by-product; not the end product. If we do everything with the intention to serve, to be compassionate and kind, then even in our ordinary everyday activities we practice Dharma.

When we are driven by ego, we say with pride: I am Indian, I am a doctor, teacher, businessman. That is an egotistical identity. When the answer is: I am a divine being, a spiritual being, here to discover myself...here for service to humanity and for self-realization, then we have finally dropped the narrow definitions that bind us.

This takes a long time. You have to practice and probe. You are on a quest, a pilgrimage. It is about the journey, not the destination, and every day you are refining your intention and your motivation to make more and more *dharmic* and spiritual choices.

TA: What is the relationship between one's *swadharma* and one's role in society?

Satish ji: *Swadharma* and role in society are two sides of the same coin. I have to find my particular gift, how I relate to human society and to nature. Ravi Shankar inspired and awakened people through music. Vinoba Bhave inspired people to share their land, to gift. Mother Teresa served by caring for the dying. All three pursued their *swadharma* not by retreating into themselves, but by bringing their inspiration into the world. They brought spirituality into all their relationships. *Swadharma* is to find and refine your

inner vocation to serve society. Wherever you find joy and *ananda*, that is your *swadharma*. Through it, you relate to society.



TA: And what is the role of society in helping an individual discover his *swadharma*?

Satish ji: By establishing schools for craftsmanship, farming, music, dance, and by teaching young people to discover themselves, society creates conditions so that individuals can find their *swadharma*. In turn, individuals nourish, nurture, and feed society. In this way society serves the individual and the individual serves society, in a relationship of reciprocity, mutuality and circularity.

TA: But we have so many schools and universities today offering a host of academic programs. Yet we find that people coming out of these programs do not resonate with even the notion of *swadharma*.

Satish ji: This is because the purpose of our schools and universities is not to help the individual find himself. Their motivation is to turn people into instruments of the economic system. At the moment, all over the world, societies are promoting economic growth, money, finance and profit. Human beings are used as servants of the economy. We need to remind society that our priorities have gone askew, and our universities must help our youth find their *swadharma* so that they can contribute towards a better society.

What we need is a revolution in consciousness. Through *Resurgence Magazine*, *Schumacher College*, and my books, I try to remind people that we have forgotten the meaning and purpose of life and have become caught in a cycle of name, fame, power and control. We need to change that.

TA: What would you say to a generation that is increasing cynical and asks, “Why do I need to serve? What has society ever done for me?”

Satish ji: There are hundreds of reasons for being grateful to society. We have to be grateful to our parents, ancestors, our teachers and our human heritage for this life, our education, and culture, for our ability to speak and to think. Society is therefore I am. Without technology and inventions like this telephone, you in Mumbai and I in England would not be able to have this communication. Everything we are and do is a gift from society, and our job is to give something back.

It's a choice that is open to each of us. Our focus can be frustration, criticism and anger. Or we can cultivate gratitude and hope. That is what young people need to recognize, which of these choices will make us happier.

When existence and consciousness come together in the right balance, right proportion and right harmony, what is born is ananda – joy, bliss, happiness.

TA: So is my goal happiness? Or is it truth? And are they different?

Satish ji: What is happiness? There are three realities: *sat*, *chit* and *ananda*. *Sat* is truth, existence, reality. *Chit* is consciousness. But when existence and consciousness come together in the right

balance, right proportion and right harmony, what is born is *ananda* – joy, bliss, happiness. The purpose of life is to find *ananda* through the practice of *swadharna*.

When Tulsidas wrote his Ramayana he said "I wrote it for my own inner pleasure, for the joy of my own heart". I take great joy in editing the magazine, writing my books, in interviews, teaching, gardening... Whatever I do, I do with pleasure. Find *ananda* in your service. That is the purpose of life.



TA: Is there such a thing as Absolute Truth?

Satish ji: There may be an Absolute Truth. But I think we have to learn to live with our relative truth. I believe in Truth Diversity. There is one Mumbai but the experience of Mumbai is different for every individual, and therefore your truth and my truth is differently experienced. So rather than speak of one single truth, rather than have the idea that my truth is the final, ultimate and only truth, I like to say that there are many paths, many ways to understand. And we must respect everybody's truth.

TA: In your book you speak of the trinity of *Soil, Soul, Society* almost as if you are adapting the value of religion to our modern context.

Satish ji: That is true. Spirituality has to transcend narrow-minded religious boundaries to search for the real truth – which is compassion, and non-violence. But this should not be limited to humans

alone. Polluting oceans, putting animals into factory farms, destroying rain forests, poisoning the soil with chemicals, is committing violence to nature. And so I am broadening the idea of non-violence and compassion to include nature.

Today, many traditional religions have forgotten, or ignore, our connection with soil. All of us living in big cities take soil for granted. We take food for granted. We think food comes from super markets. But actually food *is* soil. It is soil transformed into apples, oranges, rice and wheat. I want to remind people that technology like computers, cars and televisions are all icing on the cake. They are secondary. What are primary are Earth, Air, Fire, and Water, without which we cannot survive. I am saying we need a new trinity, and the top of that trinity is Soil.

Spirituality has to transcend narrow-minded religious boundaries to search for the real truth – which is compassion, and non-violence.

Next, we need to remember our spirituality, our motivation, our joy, and the purpose of our life. That comes from focus on the Soul. And finally, we need to relate to all human beings, rise above divisions of Indian, Russian, Chinese and American. We need to embrace our diversity and see all of society as one human family. We are made of each other. We are made of our ancestors. In one way or another we were present at the time of the big bang millions of years ago. So soul and society are two aspects of one reality. Soul cannot exist by itself, and society cannot exist without individual souls.

Soil, Soul and Society is a new trinity that I am promoting as an update to old religious values, communicating them to suit the need of our times.

TA: What do you do when you are faced with obstacles and ethical choices in your work every day?

Satish ji: I stop. I close my eyes and take a deep breath. And I think - how would Vinoba Bhave have responded to such a situation? And because of my long association with him, having read his books, heard him speak publicly and talk to me personally I can imagine his responses. This is what helps me. I believe a teacher does not have to be there all the time. One day a teacher has to die and then you have to be your own light.

You need to have courage in order to bring idealism into reality.

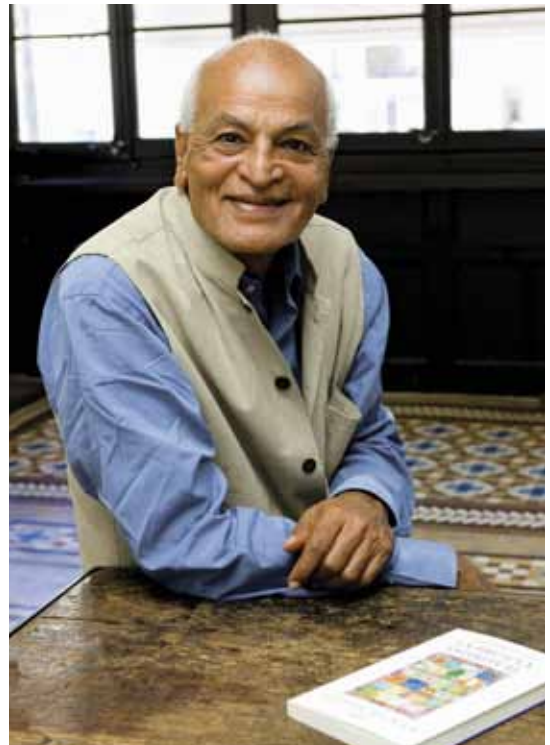
TA: What then is the role of teacher?

Satish ji: When you want to start a car, you need a key. The role of a teacher is to be that ignition. When you want to light a lamp or candle you need matches. Without a teacher to show you the way, you will be lost. A teacher provides you that map. Whatever the metaphor you use, a teacher points you towards the right direction. A teacher observes you, can see you more than you can see yourself, and can inspire you to follow your *swadharma* without getting distracted. A good teacher does not just want to collect disciples and followers. A teacher's purpose is to help students to be self-realized, and to be able to lead themselves.

TA: What would you say to the youth who are idealistic, full of hope, and want to participate, but don't know where to begin?

Satish ji: Idealism is good, it is necessary. But it is not enough. You need to have courage in order to bring idealism into reality. You need to take risks to manifest dreams into practical reality. Timidity cannot help. Overcome fear with courage, so that you can act – that's one answer.

The other - you must be prepared to take responsibility. The greatest good has come from men and women who took personal responsibility. To do that, you need courage, trust, and altruism. When you choose to do nothing, you become passive. Non-violence is not passivity, it is action. Non-violence is the method of the brave and courageous. Pushing the problem away is dereliction of duty, which makes you as good as dead.



TA: You spoke of a revolution of consciousness. How do we instigate such a revolution?

Satish ji: We start with ourselves. Every individual must say I am going to start my journey, my pilgrimage, my way of life from my own inner heart and my own consciousness. And the moment that you become the embodiment of a larger and more cosmic consciousness, then you radiate your transformation to your fellow beings, and that is how you can bring social transformation - through your own personal transformation. ★★★

EDUCATION: TO WHAT END?

BY ARCHANA SAMARTH



"Your children are not your children. They are sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself. They come through you but not from you. And though they are with you yet they belong not to you.

You are the bows from which your children as living arrows are sent forth. The archer sees the make upon the path of the infinite, and He bends you with His might that His arrows may go swift and far. Let your bending in the archer's hand be for gladness. For even as He loves the arrow that flies, so He also loves the bow that is stable."

- Kahlil Gibran

Imagine a child. Does your face light up with a smile and your mind with images of carefree laughter, innocence and abundant energy? Now, *look* at a child, look into his eyes. Do you not see life waiting to express itself? A child embodies human potential waiting to burst through and manifest itself in its uniqueness. It seeks to know, to understand, to unravel mysteries with a sense of awe and joy. I remember a seven year old native of Hampi explaining why the stone pillars of the Vithala Temple resounded with the seven notes when struck. "The pillars are like a stretched rubber band. If you run

your finger across a stretched rubber band, doesn't it give out a sound?" Perhaps not a very accurate or complete answer but what an observation...from a child who has never been to school!

As children, we too might have exhibited this same sense of wonder; the intuitive understanding that helped us to connect seemingly different things. Do we still have this ability? Or did we sacrifice it in order to conquer the school curriculum; lost in our endeavour to secure a "bright future".

From the moment of conception, parents dream of how to guide their child to fulfil aspirations... often their own. I remember a parent of a three year old child asking, "Can you assess my daughter's aptitude and say if she can become a surgeon like her father?"

The educational system is designed to assess-prepare-categorise. Is she suitable for our school? Can he recite the alphabet before even crossing the threshold of a school? Has she upped the benchmark of 98% in the boards? Does he have what it takes to become a Lawyer, a Software Engineer? Does it not sound like we are assessing if individuals can fit into a particular mould rather than extract the

potential of each child? After surviving the rigours of school, we start the race for the "best" college or engineering program. A multitude of doctors, lawyers, and programmers are churned out from our academic institutions every year. No doubt, society needs them all...but one wonders: is *this* the goal of education? Reminds me of a Pink Floyd song: "We don't need no education...All in all you are just another brick in the wall."

With an increasing number of specialisations available in the educational field, it is believed that every individual now has the opportunity to become what he or she wants to be. The question is who decides what is right for each person? The parents? The educational system? Or perhaps, the individual himself? Also, does the existing system give the right input to allow students to really foster the expression of each unique potential? And where might this potential lead? Just a profession or a vocation that we are born to identify with? Or might it have more significant meaning?

By definition *educere*, the Latin origin of the word *education*, means *to lead out or to draw out*. This implies that the original intent of education was to give life to the potential that already exists within each child, each individual, so as to bring out the best of what lies within. The focus then, is on what lies within, rather than what can be fed from the external.

While our academic systems have their merits, they have many limitations too. Recognising this, a few alternate systems have emerged. The Montessori approach, for example, underlines this goal of education: not to bombard a child with facts, but to cultivate his/her own natural desire to learn. Maria Montessori, a 19th century Italian physician and educator, recognised children's ability to direct their own learning. The Montessori approach allows children to choose their activities and learn tasks to suit their own needs at all levels - physical, social, mental and emotional.

In the early 20th century, *The Waldorf Education* was established by Rudolf Steiner stating, "Waldorf Education is not a pedagogical system but an art - the art of awakening what is actually there within the human being."

It is believed that every individual now has the opportunity to become what he or she wants to be. The question is who decides what is right for each person?

What lies within, is the pivotal point. In *The Republic*, Plato states with respect to education, "*Every individual should devote his life to what is best suited for him to do and the function of education is that of determining what every individual is by nature capable and fitted of doing.*" Plato further states that the highest goal of education is "*the knowledge of Good, to nurture a man to be a better human being, it is not merely an awareness of particular benefits and pleasures.*" This transcends the paradigm of education as a means to gain knowledge, skills, or abilities, instead suggesting its function related to sculpting the quality of a man (or woman); how he is, what he can be, rather than what he can deliver or achieve.

The reader may well ask, why propose regressing to primitive times, with such advancements such as mobile learning and virtual laboratories as mediums of imparting education today? Well, because beyond all the progress we've made, it seems that our society and academic systems are paying a high price.

India has earned the dubious distinction of recording the world's highest rate of suicides among people aged between 15 years and 29 years with *failure*

in examination being cited in the top 10 reasons. Academic achievement (or lack of it) is regarded as a cause of depression in teenage students, and children as old as just five years suffer from performance anxiety. Clearly, this suggests that all is not hunky dory in the corridors of education. Of course, it would be dogmatic to deny that the same educational system has produced noble laureates, scientists and literati of international acclaim. And yet, looking at the highly educated, successful, exhausted, frequent flyer at an airport makes one wonder: has he found what he was seeking?



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So what are we really seeking? The Greek percept of a human being may shed some light. Greek philosophers viewed man as experiencing three distinct realms: Soma, Psyche and Nous. Plato suggests that a holistic education would nourish the individual at each of these levels. Plato states, "*Do not then train the youth by force and harshness, but direct them to it by what amuses their minds so that you may be better able to discover with accuracy the peculiar bent of genius of each*".

- *Soma* is the physical realm that constitutes the tangible, the body, the *sharira*.
- *Psyche* refers to the emotional and mental

dimension which dictates our likes and dislikes, houses our feelings and desires, reflects our beliefs.

- *Nous*, our "highest" self, is our spiritual dimension. It is the eternal soul which reflects the ideals and the principles of the universe.

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For the Soma, Plato suggested sports and right nutrition. Plato himself had mastered the art and sport of wrestling and was thus as much a "doer" as a "thinker". To educate the Psyche, Plato recommended the study of the nine muses: Astronomy, Arithmetic, Geometry, History, Theatre, Poetry, Music, Rhetoric and Allegories - a curriculum that was designed to help students experience the order and beauty that exists in the universe, in life. And for the Nous, the spirit, Plato suggested Philosophy. It is through Philosophy, he stated, we can find truth and know who we really are.

Plato emphasised that education has to address the needs of a person as per his stage in life. For children below 7 years who are essentially in the stage of "receiving", he urged that they interact with nature so that they learn the fundamental principles of life and also understand their relationship to the world. By observing the diversity and the vastness of nature, a deep appreciation of the greater reality and a sense of humility can be instilled right from childhood. By exploring the world around, children also develop the quintessential tool of imagination which according to Plato, is the only way to relate to reality. In the pre teen years, when prana seems to



be at its peak, to inspire and channel this boundless energy. Plato proposed tales of Heroism. Legends that emphasised values and an inner life, where children would be inspired to playact let's say, Arjun, rather than pokemon or Batman. And the stage of adolescence, is the stage where education has to focus on facilitating the transition from a "re-ceiver" to a "doer", a "contributor"; where the seeds of a true "citizen" are sown.

As long as education is viewed as a means to personal gain, the process of education is tainted and self limiting. When it's very purpose is to go beyond the self, it facilitates a perspective that is not limited to achievement but rather, calls for contribution

Today, education seems to focus on pouring prescribed knowledge rather than allowing the child to acquire through exploration. It is resulting in restraining these bundles of energy behind desks rather than encouraging them to play outdoors, explore, observe and learn biology and physics

through nature's textbooks. Children are made to write even before their muscles have developed. Is it such a mystery then that they hate writing and are so restless and are labelled attention deficit and hyperactive?

Furthermore, the aim of education according to Plato is not merely personal growth but also service to the state. In fact, he is said to have viewed an individual's growth as linked intricately with that of the state, the country. Here lies the crux; as long as education is viewed as a means to personal gain, the process of education is tainted and self limiting. When it's very purpose is to go beyond the self, it facilitates a perspective that is not limited to achievement but rather, calls for contribution. It shifts the focus from "me" to "we". In a world that is becoming increasingly polarised on many fronts, perhaps, an education that unites an individual with fellow human beings, connects man with nature, and harmonises the body and soul, is the answer. ★★★

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LIVING IN INTERBEING

BY SANGEETA IYER



In the journey of life as we grow in consciousness, we start to become aware of a certain truth that dawns on us as gently and as lovingly as the first rays of the rising Sun – that we are all 'One Life', deeply connected to each other in mystic and mysterious ways.

James Cameron's film *Avatar* brought this home in an impactful way. The underlying theme of the film is that all life is interconnected and the *Na'vis*, a sentient race with deep wisdom, know this and live by its tenets. They are guided by *Eywa* to protect and preserve the interconnected fabric of life extending across all forms. So when a band of humans attempts to raid Hometree, the clan's gathering place, and mine the unobtainium under it, even Nature joins forces with the *Na'vis* to protect it.

Human traditions have used a variety of words, signs, symbols and other exoteric expressions to communicate the concept of our oneness. The ancient Vedic tradition refers to this inter-connectivity as *pranajeeva*; the Kybalion calls it the Law of Unity; the Mayans depicted it as the Tree of Life that unifies humanity with divinity; Nichiren Buddhism expresses it as the "principle of *esho funi* [which] means that life (*sho*) and its environment (*e*) are inseparable (*funi*). *Funi* means

'two but not two'. Although we perceive things around us as separate from us, at a more subtle level of life there is no separation between ourselves and the environment." (1)

All of us together form the warp and weft of the fabric of life; everything we think, say, or do affects our surroundings.

Similarly, classical Greek philosophers including Pythagoras described the universe as a Macrocosm – a single living entity comprising the entire universe as we know it, and of which each of us is a small but significant part. It is conceived of as an intelligent, all-encompassing organism having organs, each of which performs a role – its duty – to keep the whole universe well and ticking. And like an ocean in which there are many individual drops of water, this One Life manifests across billions of us, covering every living being whether it is a rock or a tree or an animal or a person...and goes beyond the visible forms to include the invisible ones as well.

From almost every culture, especially the ones that go back millennia in time, we learn about the

essence of Life being interconnectivity. Although it may not be obvious at first, we really don't have to search far and wide for evidence of this; we see it in the cosmos. We know that in the solar system, the gravitational force of the Sun holds the planets to their orbits in an eternal interconnectivity. Some even believe in the influence of various planets on our individual destinies and consult astrologers and horoscopes to identify the moments when their ruling planets are more favourable towards them. We know that the moon affects the ocean tides, menstrual cycles and our moods, and we're aware of the multiple symbiotic relationships in Nature between living creatures and the elements – like the wind and pollination, rain clouds and rivers, and honey bees and their role in the delicate balancing of a fragile ecosystem. (2)

In some ways, we experience this interconnectivity ourselves. We could be Zulu, Japanese, Scandinavian, Brazilian or Indian and not understand each other's languages – but we all share the same rainbow of emotions, desires and fears. No matter where we come from, we rise as one to hug our children, play with our pets, protect our homes, and wish all those we love to be safe from harm.

Beyond these exoteric similarities, there are finer aspects that unite us all at a deeper level. A melody performed by a symphony orchestra, of which each instrument, each musician, each note is strung together in perfect harmony, inspires us; it stirs our spirits and resonates with our sentiments. The same occurs at the execution of a just and noble cause; it unites us across race, gender and geography, to put our might behind what is right. Even more so, when there is an ideal that brings people together across every form of separation – like the search for wisdom, for 'the Truth' that is the essence of life itself, and which inspires us to be the best of our potential. We engage with it collectively surpassing individual identities because when the stimulus is from a higher realm, we respond from our higher selves as well.

Everything we think, say, or do, impacts everything else.

All of us together form the warp and weft of the fabric of life; everything we think, say, or do affects our surroundings. Vietnamese Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh has written about the concept of Interbeing, which he expresses as *Tiep Hien*, the Unity of the Mind and the World. (3)

Classical Greek philosophers including Pythagoras described the universe as a Macrobios – a single living entity comprising the entire universe as we know it, and of which each of us is a small but significant part.

Tiep means 'to tie two strings together to make a longer string'. It suggests the idea of the continuous process of aligning oneself to the collective. Perhaps this resonates with Madame Blavatsky's urging, "Keep the link unbroken."

Hien means 'to realize, making it here and now'; not to dwell in the world of doctrines but to bring those insights into real life, in all the three dimensions of our actions: body, speech and mind. Thoughts and words are actions too, capable of causing ripples in the world around us.

The Butterfly Effect, a term coined by Edward Lorenz, says that "small causes can have large effects." (4) It offers the "metaphorical example of the path of a hurricane being influenced by the flapping of the wings of a distant butterfly several weeks earlier." Similarly, even a mental image, a thought, can have an impact somewhere else in the world. We need to be aware that the seeds of violence are sown in our minds. It does not even have to be a murderous thought. Simply a bubble of resentment against a domineering boss, a

silent slight against a critical parent, or a wish for the failure of a ruthless competitor are all forms of mental violence which, in the astral realm, have already struck the other person – and ourselves, because, after all we're all interconnected. Could it be that the mind is far more powerful than we think? To quote John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, "The mind is its own place, and in itself can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven."

We have the choice of what we contribute to this collective. Do we offer the best of our human potential, or do we charge it with materialism and separation?

Evidently, everything we do affects the entire web of interconnectivity – for better or worse. But we have the choice of what we contribute to this collective. Do we offer the best of our human potential, or do we charge it with materialism and separation? This is the inner battle to fight every day, between our lesser self and our higher one; between our inner *Pandavas* and our *Kauravas*, our virtues and our vices. Do we choose to stand aside from the symphony of life and cause disjointed noise? Or do we bring out our best, despite the effort and discipline involved, and contribute to the harmony of the celestial music?

Perhaps this is the choice made by Jake Sully, the protagonist of *Avatar*. As the human who fell in love with Neytiri (the *Na'vi* princess who introduced him to the concept of all life being connected as a single collective entity), he at first felt awe at the largeness of it, then a growing respect and finally chose to live at Pandora, transformed in spirit into a *Na'vi* himself.

If we are mindful, we can see how to live in unity.

Undoubtedly, there are many challenges that come in the way, as one takes steps to align oneself to the

Interbeing. But most of the obstructions are within us and completely in our control. With incisive insight, Hanh shows us exactly where the barriers to interconnectivity are, with their roots entwined largely in anger, desire, apathy to the suffering of others, lack of courage and selfishness.

"Don't be bound to any doctrine or theory, not even Buddhist ones."(3)

Aligning with any one particular ideology only makes us bigoted and turns us against each other. Instead, he suggests that we use spiritual teachings as guidelines for our own investigation, to arrive at our own intuitive wisdom; an inner reality common to all life. Hence it is imperative that education be imparted as a comparative study of cultures and traditions from around the world. In addition it must also comprise various genres such as the arts and the sciences, as a means to pursuing the unifying essence of wisdom, beyond the seeming plurality and differences.



Image Courtesy: By condesign | pixabay | CC0

"Being too attached to our own views can be a barrier to real insight."(3)

When we believe that we know everything, it keeps us distant from each other and prevents us from learning anything new. Such an attitude can also prevent us from connecting with the universe. For

instance, "When we watch a sunset, we can feel its glory...but a scientist will tell us that the Sun already set eight minutes ago – it takes us that long to see it. If we cling to that knowledge, we lose the opportunity to advance in our understanding of the moment." (3)

"Don't maintain anger or hatred. Learn to penetrate them and transform them when they are seeds in your consciousness."(3)

Most often, it is not even the other person's obstinacy that angers us; it is our own inability to make them see our point of view – which we believe is the right one! Can we see it as our own failing to effectively express our view and persuade someone else to change theirs? Or even accept that it is their right to do things their own way?

Undoubtedly, there are many challenges that come in the way, as one takes steps to align oneself to the Interbeing. But most of the obstructions are within us and completely in our control.

"Don't utter words of discord. Reconciliation is an art requiring us to understand both sides of a conflict. To reconcile is not to judge by standing outside the conflict, it is to take some responsibility for the existence of the conflict, make every effort to understand the suffering of both sides, and communicate to each side the suffering experienced by the other side and offer some resolution based on an ideal common to both."(3)

"Don't live with a vocation that is harmful to humans or Nature. Livelihood is hard to find; still, if our work entails harming a life, we should try our best to find another job."(3)

We are so deeply interconnected, that in some cases, our karma is collective, too. For instance, when an agricultural entrepreneur uses harmful pesticides to maximize profits and we buy that pesticide-laden food, it may be because we refuse to pay more for organic food. What goes around comes around.



Image Courtesy: By Larica Bhatia unsplash | CC0 1.0

Another important way to contribute to the fabric of interconnectivity is not to turn a blind eye to suffering among our fellow-beings. The *Lotus Sutra* says, "Look at other beings with the eyes of compassion...compassion is the sweet water that springs forth from the source of Understanding. To practice looking deeply is the basic medicine for anger and hatred." (3)

However, being compassionate does not mean tolerating injustice as justification for pacifism. As we know from Mahatma Gandhi's stellar example, such indifference is not a virtue – it is a weakness. So rather than stand by and watch innocent people become victims, we must stand up for those who can't stand up for themselves. Living in Interbeing is also responsibility.

Why we need to inter-be

Knowing all this, as we do from so many different sources, why is it still difficult to realize and actually

put it into practice? And why is it so important to rise above differences to do what's right? Perhaps because this is the true nature of the human spirit – to engage in the daily battle of the Kurukshetra, challenge one's lower self and emerge victorious as the one who lives by a higher code of conduct to realize the One Life of which he is a part, and help others do the same.



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how often do we bear that in mind while making our choices? The film *Airlift* shows the dilemma very well, when Ranjit Katyal (played by Akshay Kumar) is transformed from a man who usually thinks only about his own interests and would have flown his family away from war-torn Kuwait without a backward glance, to one who ensures that every expatriate Indian is safely airlifted out of the war zone before he and his family fly out. For the first time, he feels connected to everyone else and puts others first.

When we believe that we know everything, it keeps us distant from each other and prevents us from learning anything new.

We are not separate; we are not alone; and we are not self-sufficient by ourselves. We are but a drop in the ocean called Life. And we can become much larger in spirit by joining in its flow. In the words of the former President of India, Dr APJ Abdul Kalam: *"Where there is righteousness in the heart, there is beauty in the character. Where there is beauty in the character, there is harmony in the home. Where there's harmony in the home, there is order in the nation. Where there's order in the nation, there is peace in the world."*(6)

To what end, one might ask...what is the purpose of living in Interbeing? The Buddha might suggest it is to dispel the illusion of separation; the greatest illusion of all, and to identify with the Oneness. It is only when we recognize this truth and live by it that we can begin to make the world a better place. Hanh quotes the Pali canon: *Dittha dhamma sukha vihari* – joy dwells where there is *Dharma*, where you participate actively in the web of interconnectivity and discover true joy in the process.

"That which is not good for the beehive cannot be good for the bee," said Marcus Aurelius. (5) And yet,

The only way to truly *be* is to *inter-be*. ★★★

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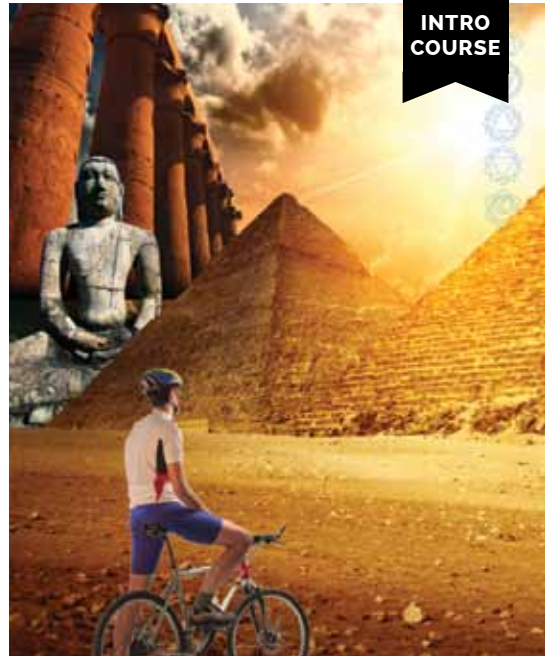
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Lecture @ Khar

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6:00PM (2hrs), FREE ADMISSION

In many traditions across the world, sacred art was used as a medium to express laws of the cosmos and man's relationship to it. Join us as we explore the significance of Mandalas and how they can be used as a tool to discover our own inner nature.



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FREE INTRO: **Monday, 14th November 2016**

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FREE INTRO: **Thursday, 24th November 2016**

Course Starts: **Thursday, 1st December 2016**

This course establishes the foundation for every aspiring Philosopher by presenting a comparative study of Classical Philosophies, and helping students to develop a sensitivity towards the fundamental Laws that govern Nature and Humanity. In an attempt to preserve this universal heritage, the course serves as an introduction to ancient cultures and investigates the origins of humanity – a time of wonder and mysticism when the invisible world was respected. Course Duration – 16 Sessions. FEES APPLY.

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The real power of Philosophy lies in its ability to improve the human condition. In celebration of our milestone 10th anniversary in India, join us on UNESCO World Philosophy Day 2016, as Yaron Barzilay (National Director, New Acropolis Cultural Organization in India) investigates the practical application of philosophy to help lead life with more depth and meaning. The presentation will include the launch of the book *Philosophy for Living*, written by International President of New Acropolis, Delia Steinberg Guzmán, published by New Acropolis India.



IN SEARCH OF BEAUTY

Lecture @ **Colaba (Main Centre)**
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Today we seek beauty externally, whether it is in travelling to an exotic destination or appreciating a work of art. What does it mean that real beauty lies within? How can we bring beauty into our own lives and daily actions?



Production Still: Rhythm is It

RHYTHM IS IT

Film Screening and Discussion @ **Khar**
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Join us for a film screening and discussion of documentary *Rhythm is It*, as it takes us on a journey of transformation as renowned music choreographer Royston Maldoom and conductor Simon Rattle stage a dance performance with 250 children and teenagers recruited from Berlin's public schools. Maldoom demands strict discipline and commitment, compelling the young dancers to become more aware of themselves, overcome their own limitations and blossom into idealists who for the first time begin to contemplate the meaning and purpose of their lives.

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DARING TO CHOOSE

Lecture @ Colaba (Main Centre)

Saturday, 3rd December 2016

6:00PM (2hrs), FREE ADMISSION

Our choices determine how happy or satisfied we are in our life. How do we make truly meaningful choices in life? Join us as we explore what it means to be an individual and how daring to choose can be the secret to attaining true freedom.



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SOCRATES AND THE WAY OF HAPPINESS

Lecture @ Khar

Saturday, 10th December 2016

6:00PM (2hrs), FREE ADMISSION

"The secret of happiness, you see, is not found in seeking more, but in developing the capacity to enjoy less." - Socrates Join us as we explore the life and teachings of Socrates in our universal quest for happiness.



GREEN PHILOSOPHY: TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE CHANGE

Lecture @ Khar

Saturday, 3rd December 2016

6:00PM (2hrs), FREE ADMISSION

For generations ancient civilizations were able to maintain a balance within the environments they lived in, but today we seem to be facing a massive ecological crisis. Join us as we re-examine our role in nature and discover how we can be the change we wish to see in the world.



ALCHEMY: THE ART OF TRANSFORMATION

Lecture @ Colaba (Main Centre)

Saturday, 17th December 2016

6:00PM (2hrs), FREE ADMISSION

Many ancient civilizations considered Alchemy to be a science that explored the unchanging laws of nature. Join us as we explore the human need for transformation and how this formed the essence of the ancient practice of Alchemy.

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