

OCT - DEC 2017

# THE ACROPOLITAN

A Magazine on Philosophy, Culture & Volunteering

FEATURE

## THE IDEAL ACTIVIST: INNER WORK FOR OUTER CHANGE

ARE WE HUMAN BEINGS OR HUMAN DOINGS?

A MOMENT TO STOP AND REFLECT

GOD, CONSCIOUSNESS, SCIENCE:  
CONVERSATIONS

SCHEDULE OF PUBLIC EVENTS

  
NEW ACROPOLIS





PHILOSOPHY

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# 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.**



**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,**

Often, perhaps, we find ourselves imprisoned by time. Caught up in the many things that we need to get done, we fail to get to the things that, in our hearts, we know we really ought to be doing. We say we don't find the time. Or that we shall get to it one day in the unknown distant future, after all our other obligations have been met. Rarely do we take a moment to stop and reflect; to consider the essence that lies at the heart of the things that we do. What is my true goal? Who am I? What does it mean to be a human being?

To answers these most fundamental human questions, bequeathed to us is the treasure trove of our collective human heritage comprising the arts, sciences and religions. Let us dare to awaken our own idealist spirit – with the courage to investigate these modes of human expressions, seeking to illuminate the enigmas of life, motivated by a yearning for Truth, which lies at the heart of all human endeavors. Let us dare to Discover, Awaken, and Transform. To BE.

Hariato H Mehta, Editor

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Harianto H Mehta

**Graphic Design**  
Janki Shah, Neha Mehta  
Printed by Vinay Arts

**New Acropolis  
Cultural Organization** (India)  
Yaron Barzilay  
National Director  
A-0 Connaught Mansions  
Opp. Colaba Post Office  
Colaba, Mumbai 400005

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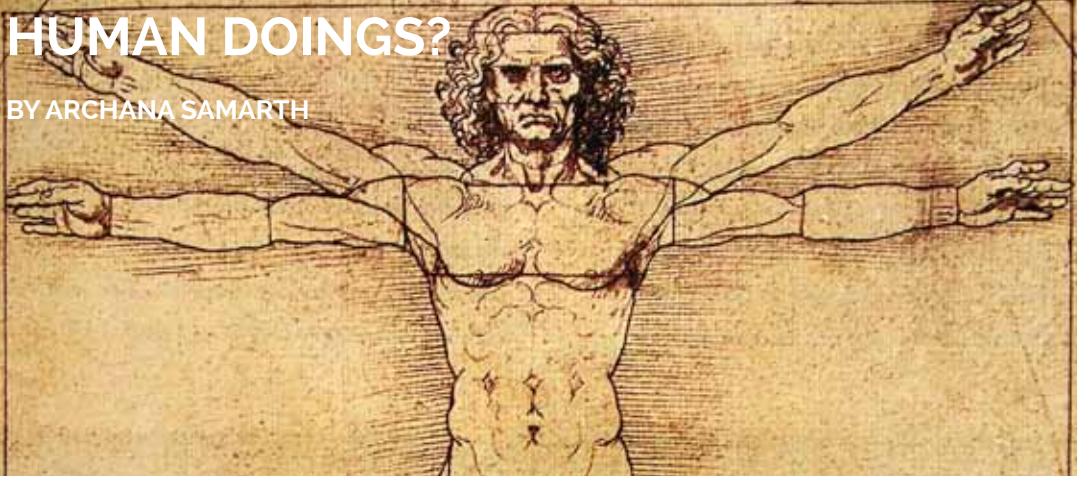
Tel: +91 22 2216 3712  
Email: info@acropolis.org.in  
Web: [www.acropolis.org.in](http://www.acropolis.org.in)

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# ARE WE HUMAN BEINGS OR HUMAN DOINGS?

BY ARCHANA SAMARTH



**This** question *is* relevant to the times we live in. The pace of life accelerated by the need for constantly moving, rushing, or accomplishing emphasises the importance we associate with *doing*. Just *being* when the whole world seems to be caught up in a whirlwind of action, seems so passive! By *doing*, we feel we are active and taking charge of our lives. But are we really taking charge of our lives and giving them a fulfilling direction? Well, let's examine this thought in our current context.

We live in the century of scientific and technological advancement, rapidly moving into a digital era. We have carried forth the effects of globalisation, supposedly making the world we live in a "global village". The word "village" evokes images of quietness and togetherness; a community in which birth, marriage, festivals and even death bring everyone together. And yet, despite living in a world brought closer by technology, we seem to be living in a period of increasing strife and separation. Think of what is happening in Syria, for example, or at our own national borders.

Let's look at an average day in our advanced world. On waking up in the morning, the mind is flooded with

a hundred things to do. Thank god for technology, we can manage our bills, funds and even grocery shopping on the internet. In the workplace, we turn on our computers and laptops to find our inboxes bursting with emails, awaiting our attention and action. And before we can start attending to the ones already in queue, more start flooding in. It's a time of instant response. We are constantly responding to the demands of cyber land and also to the needs and exigencies of the immediate, tangible environment. One almost wishes for snail mail where the gap between sending mail and receiving a reply gave us some breathing space, ample time to think things over, without the pressure of immediate response.

**Despite living in a world brought closer by technology, we seem to be living in a period of increasing strife and separation.**

To cope with the increasing and numerous demands, we try to find ways and some "quick

fixes". While cooking in the kitchen, or waiting at the traffic signal, you think to yourself: "Why not make the pending phone call to my parents (or friend)?" After all, we have only 24 hours in the day and 24,000 things to do! And the best solution to deal with this is multitasking, of course! Combining activities, extracting the most of every minute is the key to managing our time! Organisations love multi-taskers. They are believed to increase productivity as they deliver more output with minimum resources. It's a phenomenon that is not restricted to the workplace, however. Repeatedly, we see people on the roads, talking on the phone while walking, buying things, and negotiating the traffic.

Is this good? On the surface it does seem so. But in actuality, it is not. Recent research in neuroscience has found that the brain does not really do tasks simultaneously. In fact, it is said that it just switches between tasks quickly. Each time we move from hearing music, to writing a text message, or talking to someone, there is a stop/start process that happens in the brain. Having to do this swiftly when we are multi-tasking, this process is rough on our brain and rather than saving time, it costs time (even if only micro seconds), it's less efficient, we are likely to make more mistakes, and over time it can be energy sapping. (1) No wonder that this results in fatigue despite having seemingly managed time and tasks so well!

It is said that Time is the greatest equaliser – the rich, the poor, the student, the corporate executive, men and women – we all have 24 hours in a day. But the one who makes the most of the 24 hours (read "crams" the most) is said to be successful, and most effective. We glorify being perpetually busy since it seems to give a sense of being productive, of doing. But Socrates said, "Beware the barrenness of a busy life." (2)

*Barrenness? When my life is so full of action?* Let's consider this thought. We are constantly in touch with people, and our family and friends are "closer"

despite the physical distances, thanks to the wide gamut of electronic gadgets and digital mediums at our fingertips. However, although we are constantly in touch, are we really "connected" in a true sense? It seems easier to connect on the internet than to have a personal, one-on-one dialogue. Ask, what do you prefer – to call or send a text message? Many are likely to prefer the latter. We say that it saves time and is less intrusive... True, it is more convenient. Plus, we don't really have to listen to the other point of view! But is this a true interaction? Or have we reduced it to a mere transaction?

**We glorify being perpetually busy since it seems to give a sense of being productive, of doing. But Socrates said, "Beware the barrenness of a busy life."**

Technological advancement is not bad. But it is important to ask ourselves if technology is serving us, or if we have become a slave to it? Am I in control, or does it control me? Now, that is the real question!

We play many roles in our lives and every role comes with responsibilities and expectations. In each role, we are trying to satisfy some need: need for affection, financial security, approval, status, power, prestige, and so on. We feel pulled in different directions...we are all running around, doing, doing, doing and stretching ourselves to fulfil our many roles. In trying to fulfil each of our needs, are we being driven internally or from the outside? For example, when do I say I am secure? *When I look around me, I see that others have more. Am I satisfied with what I have, or do I feel insecure that I am losing out on something?*

*I want to give my child the best education, so I send her to a school which all my friends say is the best*

and where their children are studying. It's sad that she has to give up her play time by commuting two hours to school every day. But it's the best school, right? Peer influence works not only on teenagers but also on adult decisions. Trying to keep up with others and meeting their approval, how can we possibly feel like we are in charge of our own lives?

To add to this, we allow ourselves to get further confused between our wants and needs. "Needs" by definition are necessary for survival. "Wants" are self-imposed conditions. Sometimes we convince ourselves that we cannot live without the comforts and luxuries, thereby converting our "wants" into apparent necessities. For example, while it may be nice to have the latest model of a mobile phone, do we really *need* all of its available features and apps? Perhaps, it is the social pressure working on us. Who dictates what is *enough*? Are we going on auto pilot, following a herd? It seems like we are being externally driven without even realising it.

In short, *doing* involves being busy, ticking off items on the to-do list, being driven by external stimuli and doing things because it is expected of us, or because it fulfils some never-to-be-satisfied need. Moreover, as technology and artificial intelligence pervade our lives slowly and insidiously, the threat of becoming more and more mechanical is looming overhead. The need of the hour then, is to consciously and continuously assert our true human nature.

So then, what about *being*? Let us first consider what it means to be a human being. Human beings have always asked themselves the question, "Who am I?" Various schools of thought, philosophers and theologians seem to describe the human constitution differently, but the underlying principles remarkably remain the same.

A human being, as described in the Western tradition for example, has the capacity to function at different levels of consciousness wherein his

"centre" of consciousness changes and moves from one level to another. So we can say that we have a "lower" consciousness focused on the physical, emotional and mental planes. But we also have a "higher" consciousness, a realm which is beyond the ordinary, referred to as a "supra-mental". (3)



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When survival, comfort and pleasure are our focus, our consciousness is said to be fixed on the physical body. At another level, we are driven by our feelings - *I am not in the mood; It's exciting so let's do it; I am hurt*. Our consciousness can be said to be fixed in the emotional realm. Then there are times when we rationalise, look for facts or let our opinions, likes and dislikes influence our decisions and actions. Here, our consciousness is in the mental plane.

Different traditions speak of an inner battle between two forces that are present in man: one being the more earthly and material, pulling us down and the other raising our awareness to higher realms, "like fire that gives light and rises towards the divine". (4) This constant battle exemplifies the Human Being,

the only creation with the ability to make a choice. Thus it can be said that to be born as a human being is to have a choice: either to allow the reactive lower self to take charge or our higher self to direct our actions and the way we respond to circumstances.

So how do we bridge the gap between our lower and higher selves? How do we make the leap from having the potential to *being* it? Born as human beings, are we really expressing our true human potential? And what is this true human potential? When would we say we have truly expressed it?

To be a human being is to *be* - to *be* present in the moment completely, body mind and soul as opposed to being partially present, distracted by the many stimuli of the external world. It is to be mindful. It is only when we are mindful that we do justice to the moment before it passes away and is lost. To *be* is to connect with the purpose of what we are doing and do it justice. For example, when we are with a friend, let us be a friend in the fullest sense. When we say we are citizens, let us be true citizens.

Our mind is like a monkey that jumps from one branch to another. It jumps restlessly from one thought to another, one idea to another, or is constantly moving between the past, present and future. It is fragmented and rarely whole. Often this makes us think, *when and where did the moment pass me by?* It could be a task we are doing, talking with someone, reading, whatever...The inner monkey takes over and distracts us. These distractions appear in various forms. At times they take the form of a judgemental voice that finds fault and doubts, either the self, or others. At other times, it may take the form of emotional turmoil – when we are upset or angry, we are so caught up in these feelings that the immediate reality does not even register. Sometimes, it is fear and anxiety that distract us and take us away from the moment. It could be anxiety about what others will say about us, or a fear of falling short, of losing something/ someone we are attached to. When these voices

are loud and strong, they take our attention away from the present. Consequently, we do not experience the moment in its entirety and we lose out on the essence.

In all this *doing*, are we giving our best? Are we doing justice in our relationships, to our work? Or are we just doing things on auto pilot? This is a question we need to ask ourselves. While deadlines and to-do lists are not bad in themselves, it is when we get obsessed with "how much" rather than "how" that we stop doing justice. When we sacrifice quality for quantity, we are very likely to do things at a superficial level and compromise depth. And to *be* is to bring depth and meaning into what we do.

**Different traditions speak of an inner battle between two forces that are present in man: one being the more earthly and material, pulling us down and the other raising our awareness to higher realms, "like fire that gives light and rises towards the divine."**

The Ancient Egyptian culture emphasised the importance of doing everything with sacredness and bringing meaning into whatever they did. They had a term for it, *nether*. So we can say that to *be* is to bring *nether* into everything we do and fulfil its meaning, its purpose. While conversing for example, let us speak in a way that others understand us and let us also listen with intent to understand. Whether we breathe, eat, pray, work, etc., let us do it because we connect with its meaning, its purpose and not just because it is expected of us. Let us do it wholeheartedly, with commitment and by giving the best of ourselves.

Yet another interesting ancient Egyptian concept is that of *mahat*, i.e. Justice. To do justice is to fulfil one's potential. When can we say we have fulfilled our potential? Perhaps, we can begin to fulfil our potential only after we have identified the purpose of our existence. Is it to accumulate wealth or power? Or is it to know who I am, why have I been given the opportunity of this life? There must be a deeper meaning. Perhaps, it is to understand life; to grasp the meaning of the changes and the cycles, the ups and downs, and the intelligence and patterns in life. In short, the purpose of our life could be to seek truth. To quote Socrates the Greek Philosopher, "Wonder is the beginning of wisdom." Wonder that was left behind with our childhood.

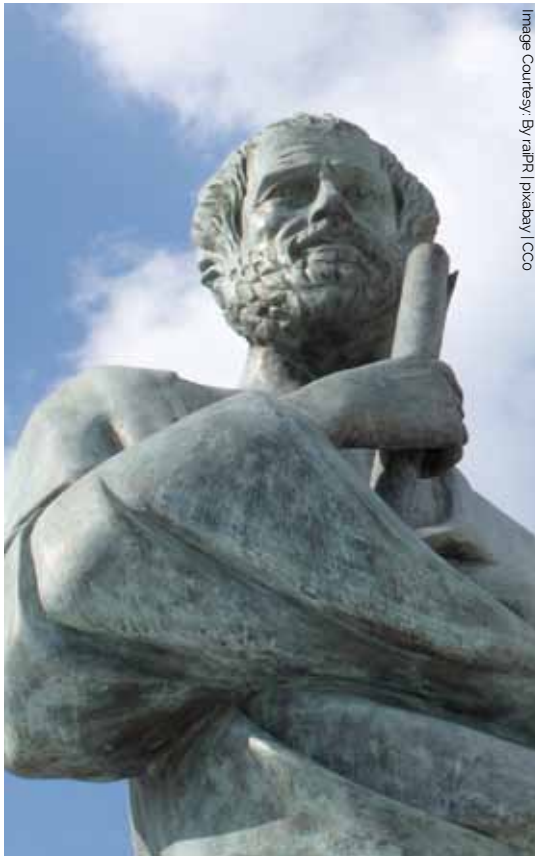


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To be human is to experience *entheos* (a Greek term meaning "filled with God or divinity"). It means to see divinity in everything - the people around

you, the trees, the animals and creatures, and even in the stones and the sand. Enthusiasm comes from the knowledge that I am interacting with something which is divine, and that I have a higher purpose.

The main difference between being an animal and being human is to be able to make choices. Human beings have the ability to elevate consciousness and to realise that what limits us is our identification. To choose an identity of the higher consciousness is to see that we are not defined by this body, we are not our emotions, we are not our ego but we are much more and that we can stop ourselves from being carried away by them. By doing this, we exercise our Free Will; the will to make choices, to be who we really are, to pursue our real purpose in life and to do what is right. Sure, this is not easy, but it can definitely be exercised and practiced.

**Enthusiasm comes from the knowledge that I am interacting with something which is divine, and that I have a higher purpose.**

To conclude we can say that to choose between *being* or *doing* is not a really a question. Because it is not this or that but it is both. We need to live with the paradox of both doing and being at the same time. What is important is to bring more *being* into the *doing* so as to lead a meaningful life, and express our human potential. ★★★

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# A MOMENT TO STOP AND REFLECT

BY ILANIT ADAR MATOKI



This article is a compilation of excerpts from the book *A Moment to Stop and Reflect* by Ilanit Adar Matoki to be published in Korean.

**In** times when knowledge is very accessible and there exists a flood of information, it is a challenge to acknowledge words of wisdom. The eyes quickly pass over unimportant words in the same manner as knowledge of great importance and value. My purpose here is to revive the words of wisdom uttered by philosophers, scientists, artists and leaders, and to emphasize the practical aspect of universal ideas that are independent of time and place.

It is intended for anyone who has not yet lost his curiosity in life, and still has the desire to live Life fully. The purpose is to allow a space of contemplation and to encourage continued internal investigation that leads back to simplicity and enthusiasm in everyday life.

***"Life is really simple, but we insist on making it complicated."* - Confucius**

We all want more simplicity in various aspects of life: in our general attitude, in the way we confront difficulties, make decisions, think, feel, etc. Simplicity is connected to happiness, because the conditions of becoming a happy human being are basically few and simple.

So why did Confucius, the great wise philosopher, say that we insist on making our life complicated?

In general we can say that something becomes complicated when we use it in a wrong way, not based on its original vocation. For example: trying to eat a liquid soup with chopsticks. In this case it will take a long time to complete the action, and the result will probably be unsatisfactory.

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**To "be natural" is to be who we really are, to follow our authentic role as a human being, as a being in evolution. This means that we can improve ourselves day by day.**

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Sometimes, we behave on an emotional and mental level, in the same way. We try to approach a situation with a wrong attitude, or we try to think about workarounds and complicated solutions, instead of the simple and direct one. There are many possible reasons why we do that. Maybe because we are afraid of people's reactions or of being different. Maybe because we don't have enough courage to act

on what we believe. Maybe we don't want to make a mistake, or take responsibility, or maybe because we simply cannot still recognize the simple solution.

Each one has his own barriers that prevent him from being more simple, but the same solution can apply to all. I found this solution in the words of another wise man, Prof. Jorge Angel Livraga: "Be Natural." To "Be natural" is to be who we really are, to follow our authentic role as a human being, as a being in evolution. This means that we can improve ourselves day by day. We can make more effort to see things simply as they are, be less influenced by other people's reactions, overcome selfishness, be brave enough to protect justice around us, get rid of envy, hate, competitiveness, etc.

In other words, simplicity is one of the human virtues, and as such, if we direct our life towards virtues, we can gradually have a clearer and simple mind, which will influence our whole way of life.

Then, after we find the simplicity within ourselves, we will be able to recognize that life too is indeed simple.



Image Courtesy/ By Cameron Kirby | Unsplash | CC0

***"A person who never made a mistake, never tried anything new." - Albert Einstein***

Have you ever met someone who told you that he doesn't want to learn anything new? Probably not. Learning is an inherent part of our evolution, and

just as we learned to walk and to talk, we continue to develop and learn more sophisticated actions.

As we know, we can't learn everything in one day; this is why we need a 'learning process'. A process requires time and a lot of attempts, because when we do something for the first time, we don't yet have enough knowledge and experience to do it well. What are the chances that we are able to play a beautiful symphony on a piano immediately after having learned its notes? It is not a realistic wish...

It is relatively easy to accept the fact that we make mistakes when we learn something for the first time. The challenge is to accept that the repeated mistakes are made because of the same personal weaknesses. For example: a mistake that repeats itself because of a lack of attention, lack of sensitivity, lack of concentration, etc. In these cases, the need is not to accept the mistake, but rather to learn from it, correct it, and continue.

In that sense, every failure, every mistake, can be an action of success. A success, because we dared to admit the mistake, we dared to overcome a weakness and we dared to learn something important that will help us grow.

And so, if we understand that mistakes are needed, and if we agree to learn from them, why then, are we so afraid to make them? Is it because we want to guard our prestige or the false image of being perfect? Or maybe it is because we don't like the feeling of disappointment?

Either way, a good solution can be to change our attitude towards the concept of 'mistakes'. Instead of experiencing them as enemies, we can see them as presents that life gives us, so we can continue to progress. A basic law of life is the law of evolution, which means that everything in nature, including man, is always learning, changing, and moving forward.

Another important thing is that thanks to our mistakes, we can gain more experience, which we can transmit to other people. This is how we can grow together as one humanity. Of course if we want to grow, we need not intentionally look for mistakes. But when they happen, let's not be afraid, let's not miss the opportunity to learn something new and move forward.

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**Every failure, every mistake, can be an action of success. A success, because we dared to admit the mistake, we dared to overcome a weakness and we dared to learn something important that will help us grow.**

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*"He who lives in harmony with himself, lives in harmony with the universe." - Marcus Aurelius*

In Indian philosophy there is a term called *Prana-jiva* which means 'life is one'. Based on this concept, all things in nature, including man, are harmoniously connected to each other, even if we cannot recognize it yet. This term is equivalent to the Chinese concept of the *Dao* which also refers to a state of harmony between two basic powers of life: Yin and Yang.

When we watch nature with a calm mind, we can absorb part of this harmony; the relationship between the moon and the stars, the mountains and the streams that flow through them, the trees and the animals that play nearby them. It seems that nature is celebrating life through a beautiful harmonious dance.

What about us, human beings? Do we feel part of this colorful dance? Can we feel harmony when our mind is preoccupied with the tasks of the coming day?

What does it mean to live in 'harmony'?

Some people will say that it is the effort to behave politely and to avoid conflicts with others. Some will say that it is a state of comfortable circumstances without any major difficulties. In these moments, when everything is calm and comfortable, we can definitely feel harmony. But what about other situations, less comfortable, less pleasant? Can we then also experience harmony?

We all want to experience a stable harmony that will not depend on external things; a harmony that starts from within and influences our relationships with others, a harmony that comes from serenity, acceptance and understanding of man's nature.

Based on the teachings of classical philosophies, the nature of man comprises 3 main parts: physical (body, energy), psychological (thoughts, emotions, fears, etc.) and spiritual (soul). According to the philosopher Plato, for example, if man wants to find harmony and balance, he needs to give the 'right nutrition' or the 'right education' to each part of his being.

Otherwise, each part will do whatever it wants and cause disharmony. For example: when we have a plan, but we don't fulfill it because of a psychological barrier. Or when we want to follow in a certain way, but we don't, because of peer pressure from the society. These gaps in our life create a lack of harmony.

Plato described what each part needs to receive in order to keep the harmony and balance. The body needs exercise and healthy food, so we will have sufficient energy for our daily actions. The psychological part needs art, music, poetry, etc. so that we can experience beauty and inspiration. And the spiritual part needs philosophy! Philosophy, not just as an intellectual study, but as a lighthouse that shows us the right and ethical direction in life.

In our hectic daily lives, it is easy to focus only on the materialistic things that we want to achieve, and to neglect the other important dimension in life. But if we are looking for real and stable harmony, we can't ignore the needs of our soul.

This harmony doesn't depend on any external factor; only on our pure will to achieve it. When one experiences it, he becomes the conductor of his own orchestra that plays a beautiful symphony.



Image Courtesy/ By Larisa Bhat | Splash | CC0

***"It is noble to aim for a noble goal, whatever the outcome."* - Plato**

In our competitive times, in which there is a need for a tool to measure the success of many things, the outcomes have become much more important than the process itself. We have gotten used to evaluating actions based on their results. If the result was good, then it probably means that the whole action was good. And likewise, if the result was bad, then probably the entire action was bad as well. Although this is not always the case, it is the general trend.

But what about the process itself; the process as a series of actions that leads to the result? For example, if someone gave his best to achieve his target, but the results weren't so good - does it

mean that he failed? And in contrast, if someone used wrong means, and indeed achieved his goals, does it mean that he succeeded?

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**Harmony doesn't depend on any external factor; only on our pure will to achieve it. When one experiences it, he becomes the conductor of his own orchestra that plays a beautiful symphony.**

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Plato, with the above quote, reminds us that the process itself is even more important than the outcome. Why? Because the process reflects who we are, and what for us, are the things that are important in life.

If noble goals such as justice, sincerity, honesty, friendship, ethics, goodness, etc. lead our life, rather than competition, personal benefits, property, etc., then any one of our actions can be successful, because it depends only on ourselves and on the way we act. In this case, there is a good chance that the results also will be as we expected.

Thus, even if we live in a time in which the emphasis is being put mainly on the outcomes, we can still choose noble criteria to lead our actions, ethical criteria that include the success of the collective, rather than only our own personal benefits. Actually, this is not a contradiction. As the famous Roman philosopher Marcus Aurelius said, "What is good for the beehive, is also good for the bee itself."

***"The whole of life is a long journey and speed is just an illusion; what matters is not the vehicle we are traveling in, but the path we are following."***  
**- Delia Steinberg Guzman**

We all know the wonderful feeling of spending time with the ones we love, when time moves so fast,



and we wish that the day would never end. We also know the feeling we have when we do something that is not interesting to us, and time seems not to move at all, every second feels infinite and we just pray that this moment comes to its end.

What is time?

Is it something fixed shown by a clock? Or is it our psychological state in a given moment? Is speed an illusion? And if so, why do we give it so much importance?



Time is one of the mysteries that man has tried to solve throughout history. Even today, with all our advanced knowledge and technology, there are many more things that we do not yet know about time, than the things we do know about it.

But sometimes, even though we have the ability or means to better understand this profound concept, our own experiences are enough to teach us how to deal with it.

For example: when we spend time with people with whom we have mutual interests, when we find enthusiasm in things we do, when we know how to look at the exact same situation from a fresh perspective, when we learn how to rest while we are working, when we have harmonious relationships of mutual trust with people around us, when we act with balance and with more control over influences from outside, etc. In all these special moments, surprisingly, we will have much more time and energy!

In these moments, time does not threaten us or make us feel stressed, but rather becomes a good friend, that gives us many opportunities to experience meaningful and joyful moments.

At such a time, as the quote implies, it doesn't matter which "vehicle we are traveling in." The vehicle is the ability to do things with various speeds. For example: while one person has the ability to move as fast as a train, another person is as slow as an old car. But, if the train is just traveling fast, without knowing where it is going, the speed becomes meaningless. Meanwhile, if the old car knows the path and the direction very well, it will arrive to its destination much faster than the train.

In this case, would you prefer the fast train, or the slow car?

The best choice is to find our own speed and rhythm, that will enable us to travel not too fast and not too slow, and at the same time to enjoy the journey itself. ★★★

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Ilanit Adar Matoki is the National Director of New Acropolis in South Korea.

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**The real activist, the idealist-activist, is one who begins change by working on the only real battlefield he has absolute control over: his own self.**



# THE IDEAL ACTIVIST: INNER WORK FOR OUTER CHANGE

BY HARIANTO H MEHTA

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**With** a burning aspiration and courageous determination, many a youth dares to dream of a better world, driven by the need to take responsibility and participate in bringing about the clearly evident need for change, whether in the realm of ecology, literacy, socio-economic disparity, or the myriad other causes that demand attention in our times. It is fair to say that it is in vogue, almost considered admirable, to stand for a cause, and many aspiring idealists turn to activism to do their share. They 'like' facebook pages, sign petitions, write articles, stand their ground in vocal protests outside of parliaments..but rarely does change really manifest, prompting a sense of disillusionment at the failure of invested efforts. When asked what their "actions" accomplished, they withdraw saying, "at least it brought about some awareness," as if the cause at hand were not already well known.

Let us first reiterate the need to foster this well-meaning and inspired attitude of ownership; one that helps us recognize personal responsibility, and encourages us to participate in the corrective change. Perhaps more than ever before, we need individuals to stand up for Truth and Justice, motivated not just by good intentions, but with the

commitment and ability to act; at the risk of sounding clichéd, to implement the Gandhian adage, "Be the change you wish to see in the world." Let us dispel the individual's sense of insignificance or helplessness in the face of seemingly monumental challenges.

***We need individuals to stand up for Truth and Justice, motivated not just by good intentions, but with the commitment and ability to act.***

For this to be sustainable and effective, however, it might be insightful to investigate the true meaning of activism. Often, an activist vociferously and angrily draws attention to the injustice suffered by an unheard or disregarded minority; he represents the specific interests of the victimized group, and in the most extreme cases, is even ready to draw up arms in their defense. Ironically, albeit unknowingly, in doing so he only further emphasizes the separation that plagues the minority in the first place. He fails to grasp the futility of his methods that in reality further amplify communal division and

highlight the aggrieved minority's isolation, rather than nurture camaraderie.



Image Courtesy: By William Cho | Pixabay / CCO

Hence, let us first dismiss the pseudo-maxim that states that "the ends justify the means". It must be acknowledged that an end, soiled by dishonorable means, lacks dignity however noble a cause it was meant to facilitate. Ancient traditions might even refer to it as unethical – the inability to unite the spirit of the goal, with the means employed to achieve it. It is evident that our times are plagued with countless examples of such hypocrisy. We must ask ourselves how is it that we find ourselves unable to recognize the senselessness in the use of violence, in order to end violence? Or the use of fear, in order to foster compassion. It is similarly irrational to dream of unity, by standing in support of just a part. It is an illusion.

In reality, the means and the goals cannot be separate. The onus is on us to find innovative ways to align our means to the goals we dare to dream. In a recent interview for Lion's Roar eMagazine, Rev. Angel Kyodo Williams offers a refreshing attitude to define activism: "What we need is the combination of a mind that wants to change the world and a mind

that is steady, clear-seeing, and seeks change from a place of love, rather than from a place of anger." (1) But how can one love an unjust oppressor, against whom we intend to protest? Interestingly she clarifies, "I hardly like anyone. But I love everyone. [And the two are not the same.] And that is possible. In fact, it's the very thing that bridges the spiritual life and the activist life." (1) Love, as a principle of Life, can be appreciated as the force of attraction that unites and harmonizes the vibrant plurality that we witness around us. In esoterism it is regarded as the fundamental primordial principle that resides in every element of creation that drives its spiritual evolution, towards perfection. It follows, therefore, that while we may, or may not, like another person's habits, views, or mannerisms, that principle of Love that drives each of us is the same. We must but learn to recognize it!

Williams elucidates that there is a "difference between aversion toward the injustice and not loving the person. My experience is that it actually has to do with the relationship we have to [sic] ourselves...we have to investigate what is not fully accepted in ourselves, what feels unworkable, untenable, and needs to be left behind. I hate that I can't do anything about violence against women and children, and that makes me hate the perpetrators. But I don't even know them, so generating hate for them is, I think, almost impossible. What I actually hate is that I feel helpless." (1) It is that helplessness, that we must let go, and the anger and hatred that emanate from it. And herein starts the long and arduous process of inner work, so often referred to as the obligation of man, described in so many ancient scriptures.

Almost as a paradox, it is suggested that a vital component of activism that seeks tangible change in the external world around us, is this need of inner work, through which to extract the hitherto described powerful force of Love. "Real political change must be spiritual. Real spiritual practice has to be political." (1) There seems to be an undeniable



link between the manifest world, and a subtler, more metaphysical realm. Some refer to it as the spiritual plane, and it is described in traditions around the world as the eternal realm of ideas, of the archetypes, of Truth, Beauty, Justice...the very ideals for which an activist wages his battles. Could it mean therefore that the activist already has the object of his search within his grasp? He must but reveal them from the very depths of his soul.

Even just a preliminary investigation will reveal this profound truth to the ideal activist. And therefore, as any homeopath or ayurveda practitioner would insist, it is futile to suppress symptoms; while it might give temporary relief, without a cure at the source, the illness is bound to resurface. Perhaps this can be extrapolated to the socio-political and ecological challenges at hand today. Is it not plausible that the source of these illnesses lie in the human psyche - our insatiated consumption patterns, a wasteful obsession with the new, and a vain need to gain mastery over our surroundings? Maybe the eminent classical philosopher Plato recognized this, and therefore asserted the value of educating the psyche through engagement with the nine muses - the nine deities representing the sciences and arts that serve as windows into the natural harmony and beauty that lie

embedded in the world around us, which a human being is able to appreciate and implement. In doing so, it might awaken the human need to align with those same principles, which in turn might express in his choices, in his attitude, and in his goals.

***There seems to be an undeniable link between the manifest world, and a subtler, more metaphysical realm. Some refer to it as the spiritual plane, and it is described in traditions around the world as the eternal realm of ideas, of the archetypes, of Truth, Beauty, Justice...the very ideals for which an activist wages his battles.***

But such an aspiring philosopher, one who dares to dream of a better world, is often dismissed as an impractical fool, wasting away his time in contemplation and ideation, rather than concrete



practical action so very necessary in our times. It is evident, however, that this perception stems from a distorted understanding of philosophy as an academic and theoretical faculty, that serves only in debate and argument, as a means of intellectual stimulation. "Philosophy" etymologically translates to "a love for wisdom". How can love ever be an intellectual notion? As anyone who has dared to love will confess, it is impossible to explain it; it requires an unconditional and total investment of one's whole self; one must experience it in order to know it. Undertaking such a pursuit requires a lot of action, not always visible or tangible action, but a lot of internal action. This is not theoretical. In it lies the potential to change the way we perceive and interact with life. What could be more practical?

***Love, as a principle of Life, can be appreciated as the force of attraction that unites and harmonizes the vibrant plurality that we witness around us.***

As the word itself suggests, activism implies practical action, beyond good intentions, and beyond idle contemplation. It must necessarily go beyond liking a facebook page, or raising banners in protest that simply spread awareness. These serve only to make ourselves feel good about ourselves, and mask our laziness and/or cowardice, by handing over the burden of effecting real transformation onto someone else. The real activist, the idealist-activist, is one who begins change by working on the only real battlefield he has absolute control over: his own self. In the Voice of the Silence, Blavatsky poetically instructs, "Thou canst not travel on the path before thou hast become that path itself."(2) Like the Sun, what if we too could become so full of light, and life, and love that it naturally radiates from us, without effort, motive, or fatigue. In doing so, the activist becomes

the embodiment and the means, of his own goal! This is echoed by Gilad Sommer (New Acropolis, Chicago): "We need to prevent the pollution of our environment, but first we need to uproot the mindset that has separated us from nature in the first place. We need to fight against war, but how can we redirect warring nations, when we cannot even solve small conflicts with our friends, family or neighbors? We speak about economical disparity, but are we innocent of the mindset that puts matter over values, gains over brotherhood?"(3)

And so, founder of International Organization New Acropolis, Prof. Jorge Angel Livraga spoke of a new and better humanity for a new and better world – a real means for a real goal. To honor his visionary dream, let us look inwards to revive true activism motivated by valor to fight first our internal battles, with love in our hearts, a militant zeal for Truth and Justice pulsating in our veins; let us become ambassadors of unity, good examples of change that others can follow. The ancients have proposed that this is bound to transform the human condition at large. Says Sabine Leitner (New Acropolis, UK): "Activism needs to be based on creating something new, not just tearing down what exists. If it is only 'reactionary' or 'revolutionary', it won't last. Building something new and better requires wisdom, an understanding of human nature and discernment about which aims are actually worth striving for in the long-term." (4) Ultimately our predicament is the failure of our civilization. But it is also our unique and heroic historical opportunity to act and build a legacy for our descendants many generations into the future. ★★★

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# REFLECTIONS ON THE METAPHYSICS OF MUSIC WITH SHUBHA MUDGAL

BY MANJULA NANAVATI



*"When the soul hears music, it drops its best guard."*  
- Socrates

**Music** is perhaps the most philosophically puzzling of all the arts. Unlike painting or sculpture it does not culminate in a physical object. Unlike literature and drama, instrumental music has no semantic value. Yet every tune, melody, theme, raga or symphony is steeped in metaphysical meaning.

Music has a tremendous ability to evoke emotion – joy, sadness, exhilaration, reverence, courage, patriotism et al. Its power to heal has been irrefutably documented, and music can be one of the most effective entrance points to meditative and sacred experiences. Cicero claimed that music could return man to paradise lost and that it was a communion with Divine Truth.

One of the highest attestations to the power of the arts' ability to touch the human spirit comes from the Nazi Concentration camps. Many of the inmates braved torture and sacrificed essential elements of survival in order to produce music, poetry and visual art. Why? Perhaps the answer is that art is part of the animating spirit, the vital spark of life. It is an insistent articulation of

who we are. It is one of the ways we express ideas when words fail us. It is one of the ways we make sense of a senseless world, and express our humanness.

In an effort to understand some of the elements related to the metaphysics of music, The Acropolis Magazine spoke to renowned singer, composer, and recipient of the Govt. of India Padmashri award, Shubha Mudgal.

Shubha ji has achieved excellence in numerous spheres; as a singer, composer, teacher, music director, and activist. She continues to play a prominent role in music education (in India and internationally), as well as its preservation, through initiatives such as [www.underscorerecords.com](http://www.underscorerecords.com) and an online encyclopedia of Indian music which is currently under development. Beautiful, charming and articulate, she speaks unhesitatingly, with a soft-spoken humility and a musical cadence that betrays her affinity to music. In spite of a long list of awards in diverse fields, her first reaction when we proposed the interview was characteristic of her innate unpretentiousness: "This is a terrifying prospect. What can I possibly say of relevance to students of philosophy?"

Yet her every answer was redolent of a very reasoned and principled outlook, underpinned by the ceaseless and exacting philosophical search for Beauty, Truth, and Justice. I could not help but draw a parallel between her journey towards a search for perfection in the field of music, and a philosopher's journey on the discipular path to unveil Truth, and the mysteries of life. Here are excerpts from our conversation, as well as reflections that went through my mind, as Shubha ji poured out her thoughts.



**THE ACROPOLITAN: Interestingly, Plato said that he would control the modes of music of a city rather than its laws, because music has a more decisive effect on the formation of the character of its citizens. Would you agree that music could stir or change you to this extent?**

**Shubha ji:** It can, and it has. And there is plenty of historical evidence of that. But I would like to add that it's not just music, but art and culture as a whole that can impact people in ways that we haven't even discovered yet. I think that's what the arts do, they move you in the strangest ways and that's why art need not always be entertaining or pleasant. It can sometimes be deeply disturbing. Various forms of art have that quality of being delightfully dangerous! I would love to be challenged by this kind of expression, because challenge is valuable.

Therefore, I really feel music education needs to be re-looked at in our country. I think a vibrant arts education program is very necessary even

more so today with the kind of anarchic violence we are seeing. I think art and culture can play a huge role in sensitizing people. Art has a liberating quality that we must share with successive generations. I don't like the word 'teach' because it implies a certain condescension, as if you already know it all. Whereas art always tell you there's more to learn. I think it's supremely important to create an educational curriculum that showcases the concepts behind music, dance, theatre, photography art, sculpture and every artistic endeavor. The tragedy of today is that all our teaching is geared to make performers. At the same time we know that even from among the most talented people who come to learn there will be very few with the strange and unique chemistry of a performer. Why do we want millions of kids to be pushed into dancing Bharatanatyam or Kathak, or playing the sitar or tabla? On the other hand it would be lovely if they knew how or what to appreciate in all these fields. Understanding Art, respecting its diversity and its liberating quality on a conceptual level, rather than trying to perform it, would be much more inclusive and add much more value to society as a whole.

*Reflection: Life is perpetually moving, flowing; by overcoming opposition she grows and evolves. Usually we resist challenges since they push us beyond the boundaries of our comfort zones, into the fearsome unknowns, the realm of our latent potential. Each obstacle is therefore, but a valuable opportunity for growth, and in facing and conquering them lies our self-development. That art might stir us, disturb our conditioned beliefs, and invite us to reassess reality, makes its role vital for humanity. "The arts are not a way to make a living. They are a very human way of making life bearable...a way to make your soul grow." - Kurt Vonnegut Jr.*

**TA: You teach in classrooms, do personal coaching and are working on setting up online tutorials. What would you say is the authentic way to pass on this cultural legacy?**



**Shubha ji:** I don't think there's only one way and I feel that each set of people concerned with this issue should keep trying in their own ways, all of which I think are valid. At the same time I feel that review must be an integral part of this process; a brutal and honest review, because every system has some strengths and some limitations and we need to recognize and overcome the limitations so that we can strengthen what is already strong.

*Reflection: There are many paths to approaching Wisdom, and each belief system has validity. Yet for a philosopher a particular path remains valid only as long as it continues to aid his progress towards the goal of Truth. The path is but a medium, in the roopa (the physical, manifest world) that acts as a bridge to the aroopa (the invisible and infinite), and so by definition it will have limitations. When the form ceases to serve the essence, it is necessary that the form be adapted. Since each path reveals only a slice of the mysteries of Truth, a seeker cannot get attached to the path itself. Instead he must embrace the diversity, discern the essential from each expression, to refine his perception, never losing sight of the unchanging Truth.*

**TA: Aside from the technicalities of pitch, tone, time, and expression, there is what the Indian coda refers to as 'the grace of the Guru'. There is the guru-shishya parampara where you tap into a whole accumulation of wisdom through an unbroken chain of the tradition comprising your Guru, his teacher and his teacher's teacher. How do you feel about that?**

**Shubha ji:** The connection with the guru is a very complicated one. It's actually perhaps the only relationship other than your maternal family, spousal family or a lover's relationship, where you choose to live together so closely. You are expected to spend a lot of time with your guru, and in a sense you face the same problems and situations that you face in a family. Rebellion happens in every generation with every set of parents and children, and it's the same

in the guru-shishya relationship also. You are part of the guru's family and yet... are you really? So it's a very complicated relationship that can sour at any moment, and historically has often done so.

I have been fortunate to have had many brilliant and eminent musicians as my gurus. Some of them actually allowed me the luxury of arguing with them, but with some of them, I did not have the courage to say a word. This relationship can be a really dynamic or damning one, to the point that it continues to exist even when they've passed on. The only woman I learnt from was Srimati Naina Devi. I could confide in her, argue with her and though it's been years since she's been gone, I can still hear her voice, I can still hear her laughing at something or giving me a dressing down. And of course they help you find your own voice, and I'm speaking literally and metaphorically, but just not as quickly as you may think you have found it. But I believe that despite the problems that arise, you're very very lucky to find that kind of relationship in your lifetime.

In spending so much time together, there is an internalizing of the content, of the form, of the system, so intensely that it becomes intuitive for you. And I think this connect that comes from this whole process of transmitting knowledge becomes sacred. They have given you a part of something that they have carried within their own selves, and I deeply revere what they gave me.

*Reflection: The difference between a 'biological father' and a 'spiritual father' is that the former is a part of the circumstances that life presents to you. But the latter is consciously sought, because you see some light, the inspiration of example, the hope of your own higher potential, which you recognize and resonate with.*

*A true guru will simply hold up a mirror; reflecting to you the traps, habits and conditioning that we unknowingly fall into, that block us from perceiving the real; He pushes his disciples to break free from*

*theirself-imposed limits. He empowers them with his own experience, awakening tools that enable them to walk their own path independently. But it takes a sincere teacher to inculcate, not blind belief, but a forum for an investigative self-discovery. A guru can only show you the path, and lead by example. But it is the disciple, who must traverse the path, by participating of his own will in the unstinting effort to actualize his true potential. Ultimately, the disciple must dare to embark on this voyage himself.*

required. And I think that's the greatest strength of the *guru-shishya* system, which is just not possible in a classroom.

*Reflection: Each philosopher is presently at a different stage in the evolution of his consciousness. Therefore, there cannot be a single set of instructions to generically apply to all. So it is crucial for the disciple's effective advancement that the master is able to extract and transmit exactly what he needs, at exactly the point that he is ready to take a leap forward. Perhaps this is why Life, in her divine justice, gives to each human being a set of unique circumstances, such that each person is given the opportunity to encounter the challenges that he is ready to face and overcome, in order to progress to the next stage of his evolutionary journey.*



Shubha Mudgal with Husband Aneesh Pradhan

Image Courtesy/ Raghavi Parthasarathy. Consent from Shubha Mudgal

**TA: Is there any one particular quality you look for in a student?**

**Shubha ji:** I think it's very important for a musician to become a good listener. And by that I mean listening not only to music, but listening in other ways too. If you're not listening to what is happening around you, you're in an ivory tower, detached from life, how can you be a great artist? If you're not listening to other people and you're saying, "Listen to my voice alone," you're a dictator in the making! You may choose to isolate yourself for your work, but without that connect with life, if you're not listening to life, what's the point of calling yourself an artist? All my *gurus* (who perhaps would not agree with every belief I hold) all of them said, "Listen, listen, listen." And not just to people from your own circle, or your own *gharana*, or disciples of your own teacher, but to everybody, because life is all around you and life will teach you.

**TA: Do you think this system can work, today?**

**Shubha ji:** My husband Aneesh Pradhan and I teach many students on a one-on-one basis. What we decided long ago was that as far as possible we would conduct classes just the way we had learnt. The homes of our *gurus* were kept open for us. And we try to share in the same manner what our *gurus* shared with us. We try and customize the training for each person because that's the hallmark of this entire system. This is why you need that kind of exposure to each other. It is called *seena baseena* which literally means 'chest to chest', so close must be the bond, because you're transmitting knowledge and personalizing the training of that particular student depending on exactly what is

*Reflection: For a philosopher, an attitude of wonder is his greatest tool; the ability to listen, receive, and learn at every moment from the greatest teacher of all: Life. Nature is an open book; we must learn to read her language, to discover her mysteries.*

*We must work with her principles, connect with her wisdom, and harmonize with her laws.*

**Beyond the religious customs that subsequently developed, these ancient traditions speak of Discipleship; an ardent and persevering path of constant self-development which illuminates man's potential.**

**TA: The ancient Greeks believed that music was an expression of man's yearning to participate in the harmony of the "music of the spheres". By participating in this heavenly harmony, music could induce spiritual harmony of the soul. As a composer or singer, do you tap into this spiritual space?**

**Shubha ji:** Certainly. There is one very important aspect of *bhakti*, which is not about ritual, but about surrender. It is when you realize that this is what you're committed to, whether it is in the form of worshipping a particular deity or a system of prayer. In the same way there is surrender in music also. When we say we are madly in love with music, it is that sense of surrender. However spiritual, philosophical and connected with very deep profound thinking that music can be, it can also be overwhelming or distressing, creating a sense of restlessness. For me, it helps to have the steady drone of the tanpura, which acts as a gateway that allows me to enter a certain space that is really... beautiful. But I'm unable to do it very often, in spite of really trying, because sincerity of effort alone is not enough. This perfect harmony, of being in tune with life and nature is certainly a goal, but it happens rarely, and neither should you con yourself into believing that it is happening.

*Reflection: Many traditions speak of 'theophanic kidnapping' - a mystical experience akin to a*

*'spiritual kidnap', where just for a moment your consciousness is elevated to a place you have not conquered as yet. The memory you retain of that serenity propels you to pursue a search to regain that ephemeral occurrence. It becomes a compass to guide you through the quotidian work that must be done to achieve the authentic goal, to avoid the danger of fantasizing, and to be able to discriminate between the temporary and the eternal.*

**TA: With regard to the trend of fusion music - do you think we are losing the potent characteristics of each genre or do you feel that new forms add vibrancy to the language?**

**Shubha ji:** Even a river develops tributaries and changes its course over time. So how can art forms remain static? It's just not possible for art forms to remain unchanged or untouched. Fusion is not a new trend, it has happened in various ways over decades and centuries. For a form to be alive today it would have had to change with time. So there is no form that we are performing today for which we can say this is exactly how it was done 5000 years ago. Everything you listen to affects you and I think engagements with other forms and disciplines can be enriching, and the experiments, whether I like them or not, are valid as long as it is done respectfully. The real problem occurs when you bring ego into it, and say "I am doing this very special thing that no-one has done before."

**TA: On the other hand, as a performer, do you not need a sense of total belief in yourself to fuel the performance?**

**Shubha ji:** When you perform in front of thousands of people and bare your soul, then you need to be secure in what you're doing. So yes a sense of belief and confidence and maybe a little bit of ego also creeps in. But afterwards, the minute you get off that stage, you must be able to put your ego in a box, and put a lock on it. You need to be able to accept that you may have made some mistakes, because

after all, art is all about looking for perfection, never finding it. And acknowledging that you will never find it because as human beings we haven't been built for perfection.

**TA: Constantly aspiring for perfection while knowing you will never reach there could be an inspiration to excellence for some, but couldn't it also make you resigned to failure?**

**Shubha ji:** Yes, often it can bring you down. You have to accept that you have limitations. You have to accept that finally we're all aging - your voice and your mind. But I feel that it can help your art in many ways to know that these are my limitations, and yet to keep working on your art despite that. Perhaps, rather than looking for the pyrotechnics that you did with your voice when you were 20, you now look for wisdom, and maturity and change to liberate your performance. So I love the wisdom in the voices of senior singers and I love the whole idea of journeying down a path with music as a companion, feeling boxed in at times and pursuing the answers that will liberate you.

*Reflection: Every spiritual tradition maintains that we are all progressing towards Unity, Perfection, Nirvana; that it is our destiny to finally arrive there, although it is a goal far beyond our reach today. However, perhaps our glory lies in the recognition that every challenge faced, and every obstacle overcome, is one step further down the path, one step closer to our destiny. That Perfection is so far, cannot deter us from our militant march towards it.*

**TA: This is of course an echo to the philosophical question we all face, of constantly aspiring towards a higher aspect of ourselves, and not losing heart. What is the inspiration you hold on to?**

**Shubha ji:** For me it is the connection with music itself. There is nothing else that I would rather be devoting my life to. There is nothing else that draws me so strongly, and it is the very ups and

downs that together create that dynamic tension that is so necessary to life. Without that we would be mechanical robots delivering music, absent the opportunity for personal growth.



Image Courtesy: Raghav Pasricha. Consent from Shubha Mudgal.

I have been through moments of, I won't call it loneliness, but of discouragement, a feeling of this-is-not-going-the-way-I-want-it-to. But this too is ego isn't it? That's why in a sense I don't like to set definite goals that are about my achieving this or that.

I really feel you just have to keep journeying on the path. I have already discovered this is what I want to do, in my own limited way with my own limited resources. So whether the record labels or event companies are going to call me or not, makes absolutely no difference. Awards are reassuring; they are a pat on the back. But if I didn't get them would I stop? Never. Nothing could stop my traversing this path. I have to. I want to. I must.

*Reflection: It is a law that every action, must yield a reaction - and hence we will necessarily bear the fruits of our actions - at the just moment, in just measure. However, let the fruits be a consequence, not the drive of our actions. ★★*

# GOD, CONSCIOUSNESS, SCIENCE: CONVERSATIONS

BY SUKESH MOTWANI

**As** philosophers born in an age where Science is leading the pursuit of answering questions to do with life, creation and the nature of reality, it becomes incumbent upon us to keep alive the sense of wonder at the underlying order and harmony in the workings of the universe. The search for 'truth' and 'meaning' has driven philosophers, scientists and religious thinkers alike... so would it really be presumptuous to qualify this search as one to do with the ultimate mystery, the enigma of God? This article looks at this enigma by reproducing interesting conversations on the interplay between scientific pursuits and spiritually based ideas from renowned scientists and writers. It sets out to show how rationalists and scientists do concur albeit in different ways, that there is an invisible force that animates all of us and determines the laws of nature and the universe at large. Furthermore, this invisible force is currently beyond tangible parameters of definition or measurement. Simply put in the revered words of Einstein: "Human beings, vegetables or cosmic dust, we all dance to a mysterious tune, intoned in the distance by an invisible piper."

It is said that Einstein couldn't help but be in awe when contemplating the mysteries of eternity, of

life, of the marvelous structure of reality. Max Planck one of the greatest theoretical physicists, concurred on this in a more definitive way by declaring that there can never be any real opposition between science and religion for one is the complement of the other. He concludes that science cannot solve the ultimate mystery of nature because in the end, we ourselves are a part of the mystery that we are trying to solve! Indeed it is not by accident that many of the greatest thinkers of all ages are deeply religious. It seems that any serious and reflective person must realize that the religious element in his nature must be recognized and cultivated.

"Everyone who is seriously involved in the pursuit of Science," Einstein wrote to a little girl who asked him whether scientists pray, "becomes convinced that some spirit is manifest in the laws of the universe, one that is vastly superior to that of man." Carl Sagan seconded, "The notion that science and spirituality are somehow mutually exclusive, does a disservice to both. The science-spirituality 'debate' is unwinnable, and it leads us astray. To insist that science and religion speak the same language, or draw the same conclusions, is to miss the point of both pursuits of cohesive knowledge and underlying truth. To create a competition between them, in





St. Augustine's words about the reverence for the human physical experience:

"Men go forth to wonder at the heights of mountains,  
the huge waves of the sea,  
the broad flow of the rivers,  
the vast compass of the ocean,  
the courses of stars:  
and they pass by themselves without wondering."

That fascinating and vital discomfort between science and religion is precisely what physicist Alan Lightman, one of today's finest science essayists, explores in *The Accidental Universe: The World You Thought You Knew*. In the foreword, Lightman recounts attending a lecture by the Dalai Lama at MIT: "one of the world's spiritual leaders sitting cross-legged in a modern temple of science." He heard a talk about the Buddhist concept of *sunyata*, translated as emptiness — the notion that objects in the physical universe are vacant of inherent meaning and that we imbue them with meaning and value with our minds. Lightman adds, "As a scientist, I firmly believe that atoms and molecules are real (even if mostly empty space) and exist independently of our minds. On the other hand, I have witnessed first-hand how distressed I become when I experience anger or jealousy or insult, all emotional states manufactured by my own mind. The mind is certainly its own cosmos. As Milton wrote in *Paradise Lost*, "[The mind] can make a heaven of hell or a hell of heaven." In our constant search for meaning in this baffling and temporary existence, trapped as we are within our three pounds of neurons, it is sometimes hard to tell what is real. We often invent what isn't there. Or ignore what is. We try to impose order, both in our minds and in our conceptions of external reality. We try to connect. We try to find truth. We dream and we hope. And underneath all of these strivings, we are haunted by the suspicion that what we see and understand of the world is only a tiny piece of the whole. Science does not reveal the meaning of our existence, but it does draw back some of the veils.

This tension between internal and external reality is also what lies at the root of the age-old tension between science and religion."

At another occasion, Lightman argues against the notion that science is the religion of our century: "If science is the religion of the twenty-first century, why do we still seriously discuss heaven and hell, life after death, and the manifestations of God? Biologist Nancy Hopkins manipulates the DNA of organisms to study how genes control the development and growth of living creatures. Does that make it seem like modern science has now pushed God into such a tiny corner that He, or She, or It, no longer has any room to operate in — or perhaps has been rendered irrelevant altogether? Not according to surveys which show that more than three-quarters of Americans still believe in miracles, eternal souls, and God. Despite the recent spate of books and pronouncements by prominent atheists, religion remains, along with science, one of the dominant forces that shape our civilization. Our little group of scientists and artists finds itself fascinated with these contrasting beliefs, fascinated with different ways of understanding the world. And fascinated by how science and religion can coexist in our minds."

Lightman asserts that there are things we take on faith, without physical proof and even sometimes without any methodology for proof. We cannot clearly show why the ending of a particular novel haunts us. We cannot prove under what conditions we would sacrifice our own life in order to save the life of our child. We cannot prove whether it is right or wrong to steal in order to feed our family, or even agree on a definition of right and wrong. We cannot prove the meaning of our life, or whether life has any meaning at all. For these questions, we can gather evidence and debate, but in the end we cannot arrive at any system of analysis akin to the way in which a physicist decides how many seconds it will take a one-foot pendulum to complete its swing. The previous questions are questions of aesthetics, morality, and philosophy. These are questions

for the arts and the humanities. At any moment in time, every scientist is working on, or attempting to work on, a well-posed problem, a question with a definite answer. But for artists and humanists definite answers don't exist to all interesting and important questions. Indeed, this tolerance for the unanswered — and possibly the unanswerable — is not only at the heart of creativity and the secret of happiness, but also, Lightman argues, the essence of faith — "Faith, in its broadest sense, is about far more than belief in the existence of God or the disregard of scientific evidence. Faith is the willingness to give ourselves over, at times, to things we do not fully understand. Faith is the belief in things larger than ourselves. Faith is the ability to honor stillness at some moments and at others to ride the passion and exuberance that is the artistic impulse, the flight of the imagination, the full engagement with this strange and shimmering world."

V. V. Raman (emeritus professor of physics and humanities at the Rochester Institute of Technology and author of *Truth and Tension in Science and Religion*) states that Hinduism, which has kept an awareness and practice of art as life-giving at the very centre of daily lived spirituality, has historically avoided a point counterpoint between science and religion. Raman says that in the Hindu world there was a clear understanding of what constitutes religious knowledge on one hand, and what may be called intellectual, analytical, secular knowledge on the other. Just as he would call the science-religion debate in the west as that of cognitive dissonance, he would call this debate in Hinduism, an experiential consonance wherein it is possible to look at some things from a logical and analytical framework which is what Science provides, and to distinguish that from another level of experience in the world, which comes from what may be called deep involvement. He feels that one of the unfortunate consequences of the sciences is the addiction to rationality. As he sees it, knowledge conveyed by art and poetry and beauty is not

irrational, but it is transrational, and as critical in human life as rationality. He uses the analogy of a sonnet. Logic can analyze it powerfully in terms of structure; the human spirit will plumb it for meaning. He juxtaposes shared elements of both science and religion to explore the complementarity of these two realms of human endeavor. When Pascal wrote his famous statement, "*Le coeur a ses raisons que la raison ne connaît point*" - the heart has its reasons which reason doesn't understand - those are ways by which the enlightened thinkers and visionaries understood that the world is far too complex for us to really rigidly put everything under the strait jacket of reason.



Image Courtesy of William Bourl Unsplash CCo

A great majority of scientists believe that a complete and final set of laws governing all physical phenomena exists and that we are making continual progress towards the discovery of those laws. That belief is part of the central doctrine of Science. Let us turn to religion. In his landmark study of religion, *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), Harvard philosopher William James described religion in this way: "Were one to characterize religion in the broadest and most general terms possible, one might say that it consists of the belief that there is an unseen order and that our supreme good lies in harmoniously adjusting ourselves thereto." So religion and spirituality are therefore fundamentally personal and subjective experiences which distinguishes them from science. Let's assume that it can be broadly

classified as two kinds of knowledge in religion: the transcendent experience and the content of sacred religious books, such as the Old Testament of Judaism, The New Testament of Christianity, the Koran of Islam and the Upanishads of Hinduism. The transcendent experience - the immediate and vital personal experience of being connected to some unseen divine order - is beautifully described by a clergyman in James's book: "I remember the night and almost the very spot on the hilltop, where my soul opened out, as it were, into the Infinite and there was a rushing together of two worlds, the inner and the outer. It was deep calling unto deep - the deep that my own struggle has opened up within being answered by the unfashionable deeply without, reaching beyond the stars. I stood alone with Him who had made me, and all the beauty of the world, and love and sorrow and even temptation. I did not seek Him, but felt the perfect union of my spirit with His..." The extremely personal and immediate nature of the transcendent experience described here is what gives it power and force. This experience is ultimately beyond analysis. The truth and power of it lies in the subjective experience itself. Qualities of that experience cannot be quantified or measured like readings on a voltmeter, and thus cannot be transferred to others."

Another perspective on the nature of reality from an idealist's point of view (from *The Presence of the Sacred* by Sima Sharma, featured in a book called *The Song of the Spirit*): "The materialist respects material nature as substance or energy. To him Reality reveals the laws and principles that pertain to matter and phenomena. To the idealist the phenomenal world is just an appearance and the Idea already is the Reality: the universe conforms this to his individual experience and reveals coherent answers. But each, materialism and idealism, taken to the extreme to exclude each other, devalues cosmic experience and human life, leaving the human being deeply divided. A chasm opens up between the world of facts and the truth of experience...Where humanity stands today, this split

in our psyche is actually felt. We have intimations of the interconnectedness of all things - thought with life, and life with phenomena and matter. What we are left with is an intuition of wholeness but an experience of fragmentation."



Image Courtesy: By Sayan Nath Uraplasi | CC0

In his own way, the revered Dalai Lama talks about bringing this subjective experience within the ambit of science in his book *The Universe in a Single Atom* where he is advocating methods for the convergence of science and spirituality. In the scientific processes applied to study consciousness, he feels that when we listen to a purely third person 'objective' account of mental states, whether it is a cognitive psychological theory, a neurobiological account or an evolutionary theory, he feels that a crucial dimension has been left out - which is the subjective experience of the individual. He asks whether we can envision a scientific methodology for the study of consciousness whereby a robust first person method which does full justice to the phenomenology of experience, can be combined with the objective perspective of the study of the brain. And this may lead not only to greater understanding of consciousness but also to a better understanding of the dynamics of the human mind and its relation to suffering.

New theories in neuroscience suggest consciousness is an intrinsic property of everything, just like gravity. That development opens a world of opportunity for collaboration between Buddhists and neuroscientists. "The heart of consciousness," says neuroscientist Christof Koch, "is that it feels like something. How is it that a piece of matter, like my brain, can feel anything?" In 2013, Koch, one of the world's leading experts on consciousness, and the Dalai Lama debated neuroscience and mind for a full day. They had different approaches. Koch offered contemporary scientific theories on the subject, and His Holiness countered with ancient Buddhist teachings. Yet, at the end of their discussion, the two thinkers agreed on almost every point. "What struck me most was his belief in what we in the West call 'panpsychism' — the belief that consciousness is everywhere," says Koch. "And that we have to reduce the suffering of all conscious creatures." Panpsychism, the idea of universal consciousness, is a prominent thought in some branches of ancient Greek philosophy, paganism, and Buddhism. And it has been largely dismissed by modern science — until recently. In his work on consciousness, Koch collaborates with a researcher named Giulio Tononi. Tononi is the father of the most popular modern theory of consciousness called Integrated Information Theory (IIT). Tononi's theory states that consciousness appears in physical systems that contain many different and highly interconnected pieces of information. Based on that hypothesis, consciousness can be measured as a theoretical quantity, which the researchers call phi.

But beyond the physical brain, scientists have barely begun to develop an understanding of mind — or consciousness — itself. On the other hand for thousands of years, Buddhism associates the mind with sentience. The late Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche stated that while the mind, along with all objects, is empty, unlike most objects, it is also luminous. In a similar vein, according to IIT, consciousness is an intrinsic quality of everything. And yet it only

appears significantly in certain conditions — like how everything has mass, but only large objects have noticeable gravity.

In his major work, *Shobogenzo*, Dogen, the founder of Soto Zen Buddhism, went so far as to say, "All is sentient being." Grass, trees, land, sun, moon and stars are all mind, wrote Dogen. "I was confronted with the Buddhist teaching that sentience is probably everywhere at varying levels, and that inspired me to take the consequences of this theory seriously," says Koch. With more research, Koch and Tononi could better test consciousness, to prove scientifically that all beings are sentient. Meanwhile, Buddhists around the world are constantly working to develop an understanding of the mind. Traleg Rinpoche said that analytical methods can only go so far toward understanding the mind. Instead, he says, by resting his or her mind and contemplating it, a meditator can develop an understanding of the nature of mind and how it relates to everything else.

Based on the above conversations, one believes that the enigma of God is the most beautiful and alluring question that is worth pursuing from every perspective, every available mode of inquiry. There is no distinction between the spiritual and physical universes, no distinction between the inner and the outer, between the subjective and the objective, between the miraculous and the rational. And all the same paradoxically speaking, many others would need such distinctions to make sense of their spiritual and scientific lives. ★★★

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# SCHEDULE OF PUBLIC EVENTS

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## A TIMELESS JOURNEY THROUGH SACRED ARCHITECTURE

Interactive Talk @ **Colaba (Main Centre)**

**Saturday, 14th October 2017**

6:00PM (2hrs), FREE ADMISSION

The Great Pyramids, Stonehenge, Angkor Wat, and many other such magnificent monuments are our legacy. Is the glory of these monuments limited to what we see? Or are they capsules of wisdom waiting to be unravelled? Perhaps they capture an astonishing understanding of the Universe. Through this presentation, we will journey through the tenets of Sacred Architecture that might have some implication for us today.



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## WHAT IS BIOMIMICRY – INSPIRED BY NATURE

Interactive Talk @ **Khar**

**Saturday, 14th October 2017**

6:00PM (2hrs), FREE ADMISSION

In our age of technology and rapid scientific advances, Biomimicry has become popular for disruptive innovation. Biomimicry suggests that there is a secret to the workings of nature that man can use to inspire better design, architecture, and engineering. A full circle back to nature? In this talk, we will explore fascinating secrets of nature. Perhaps they are better known to us than we imagine!



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## RE-FORESTING MUMBAI

PRE-REGISTRATION REQUIRED

Workshop @ **IWC Forest, Lokhandwala, Kandivali East**

**Sunday, 15th October 2017**

9:00AM (3hrs), FREE ADMISSION

Come join us as we undertake to restore a part of Sanjay Gandhi National Park to its pristine glory. Learn about native trees and the nuances of a natural ecosystem. Lend a hand in the ongoing plantation activity and return energized and well educated about what it takes to regrow a forest one tree at a time. Register by writing to [ubai.husein@acropolis.org](mailto:ubai.husein@acropolis.org)

# SCHEDULE OF PUBLIC EVENTS

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## EARTH – BEYOND SCIENCE

Interactive Talk @ Khar

**Saturday, 28th October 2017**

6:00PM (2hrs), FREE ADMISSION

The Human Being has a very intimate connection with the Earth, our home. But do we truly understand this relationship? Beyond the wonders of nature, is there something more? In this talk we will explore the bounty of our planet which is meaningful for our lives today, giving us a firmer grasp of who we are and why we refer to the planet as "Mother Earth".



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## FAQS OF LIFE - TEACHINGS OF THE GREAT TEACHERS!

Interactive Talk @ Colaba (Main Centre)

**Saturday, 4th November 2017**

6:00PM (2hrs), FREE ADMISSION

In our journey through life we often ask fundamental questions about our purpose, and life's ultimate meaning. If only there was someone to answer these Frequently Asked Questions. We will see how these questions sparked the investigation of wise men through the ages who sought answers, leaving for us a wealth of experience!



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## ALL THE WORLD'S A STAGE - THEATRE BEYOND ENTERTAINMENT

Lecture-Workshop @ Khar

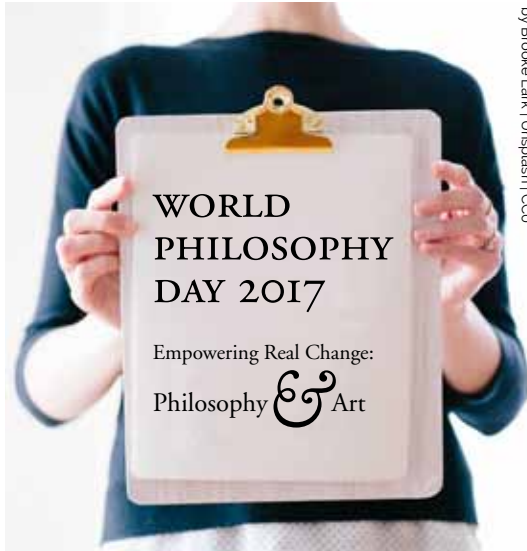
**Saturday, 11th November 2017**

6:00PM (2hrs), FREE ADMISSION

In any form of theatre, actors enact roles and adopt characters. Don't we also wear many masks in life, playing many roles? Through some basics of theatre, we will explore the manner in which we might do justice to the many roles that we play in life.

COLABA (MAIN CENTER)  
A-0 Ground Fl, Connaught Mansion,  
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T: +91 22 2216 3712

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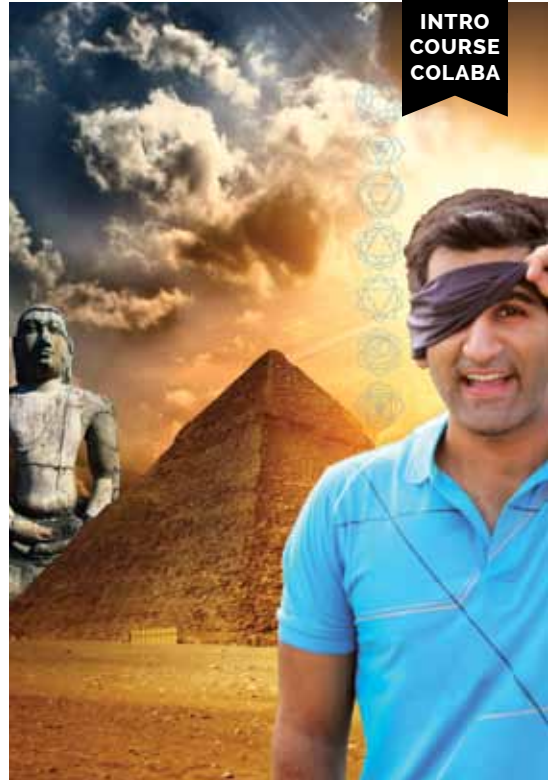


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## WORLD PHILOSOPHY DAY 2017 EMPOWERING REAL CHANGE: PHILOSOPHY AND ART

PRE-REGISTRATION REQUIRED  
Panel Discussion and Presentation  
@ National Gallery of Modern Art  
Thursday, 16th November 2017  
7:00PM (2hrs), FREE ADMISSION

*"Art requires philosophy, just as philosophy requires art. Otherwise, what would become of beauty?"*  
- Paul Gauguin. The National Gallery of Modern Art (Ministry of Culture, Government of India) and New Acropolis (India) celebrate World Philosophy Day 2017 with a discussion and presentation on "Empowering Real Change: Philosophy and Art". Photographer and philosopher Pierre Poulain, classical dancer Miti Desai, founder of The Kabir Project Shabnam Virmani and National Director of New Acropolis (India) Yaron Barzilay come together to explore the inherent connection between philosophy and art in its diverse expression. Join us as we explore how philosophy and art together can effect sustainable change and promote beauty and harmony for the individual and society. Register at [info@acropolis.org.in](mailto:info@acropolis.org.in) or +91 9820287683.



## LIVING PHILOSOPHY: DISCOVER, AWAKEN, TRANSFORM

PRE-REGISTRATION REQUIRED  
Course @ Colaba (Main Centre)  
FREE INTRO: Monday, 20th November 2017  
Course Starts: Monday, 27th November 2017  
7:30PM (2hrs)

This is a 16-week introductory course on practical philosophy that establishes the basic foundation of every aspiring Philosopher. The course weaves a journey through a comparative study of principles of Eastern and Western Civilization, to develop sensitivity towards the eternal principles of life. Together we will explore the Mystery that is hidden in life and what it means to be a philosopher. The course is to inspire you to ask the great questions of life, and to give you tools to face personal and collective challenges.



# SCHEDULE OF PUBLIC EVENTS

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## THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE RAGA

Guided Indian Classical Music Appreciation

@ Colaba (Main Centre)

**Saturday, 25th November 2017**

6:00PM (2hrs), FREE ADMISSION

Listening to an invigorating "morning raga" can inspire even the musically illiterate. What is it about music that can touch our hearts? In this guided music appreciation, we explore some nuances of the language of Indian classical music, to unravel something about the rhythm of nature and life!



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## MANGROVE CLEAN-UP DRIVE

PRE-REGISTRATION REQUIRED

Volunteering Activity @ **Afghan Church, Colaba**

**Sunday, 3rd December 2017**

2pm to 4pm (2hrs)

Did you know that the Mangroves sequester over 5 times the amount of carbon dioxide from the environment, more than land based trees. In addition they provide a safe environment for the preservation several aquatic creatures and in addition stand as buffer on the coast protecting the city against the fury of the natural disasters like Tsunamis and Tidal Waves. Unfortunately the garbage that is dumped out into the seas are suffocating and destroying this natural treasure. As a second in a series of clean-ups, join our volunteers us as we clean-up a stretch of Mangroves at Colaba. Register by writing to ubai.husein@acropolis.org



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## LIFE - A DELICATE BALANCE

Interactive Talk @ **Khar**

**Saturday, 25th November 2017**

6:00PM (2hrs), FREE ADMISSION

We find ourselves fraught with the challenge and opportunity to choose, evaluate and prioritize at every step. We face circumstances in life which demand our response. How do we balance our lives and make better choices? To seek harmony is natural for each human being. This talk looks at how we can bring inner harmony to balance the many contradictions of our lives! To be presented by the National Director of New Acropolis Cultural Organization, Mr. Yaron Barzilay.

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Colaba (Opp. Colaba Post Office),  
Mumbai  
T: +91 22 2216 3712

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Ashray, 2nd Floor, 19th Rd,  
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## I'M A VOLUNTEER – WHAT'S YOUR SUPERPOWER?

Interactive Talk @ Colaba (Main Centre)  
**Saturday, 9th December 2017**  
6:00PM (2hrs), FREE ADMISSION

How do we contribute towards a better world when the problems of the world seem too big to surmount? Change is always challenging. The Volunteer that sets out to make a change is indeed a "Superhero" that gives us hope for miraculous change! We will see together, what lies at the core of the Spirit of Volunteering? How can we cause sustainable change to build a better tomorrow!



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## THE ART OF WAR – DEVELOP THE LEADER IN YOU

Interactive Talk @ Colaba (Main Centre)  
**Saturday, 16th December 2017**  
6:00PM (2hrs), FREE ADMISSION

*"He will win who knows when to fight and when not to fight" – Sun Tzu.* What about great men changed the courses of history? As true leaders they had mastered the art of leading their own lives, guiding by personal example! With teachings from the Mahabharata and The Art of War we might learn how to recognize and lead ourselves in the battle of everyday life.



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## BEING BEAUTIFUL – PHILOSOPHY AND FASHION

Interactive Talk @ Khar  
**Saturday, 9th December 2017**  
6:00PM (2hrs), FREE ADMISSION

What really is Beauty? Aren't we touched by the beauty of a flower, or the beauty of a profound poem? Many cultures refer to a timeless beauty, such as the beauty that is expressed in fashion. We question if beauty is subject to opinion, and if it changes with time. In this talk, we will examine timeless beauty and see how we might express and sustain Beauty as human beings.



## LOOK WHO'S TALKING - COMMUNICATION IN 21ST CENTURY

Interactive Talk @ Khar  
**Saturday, 16th December 2017**  
6:00PM (2hrs), FREE ADMISSION

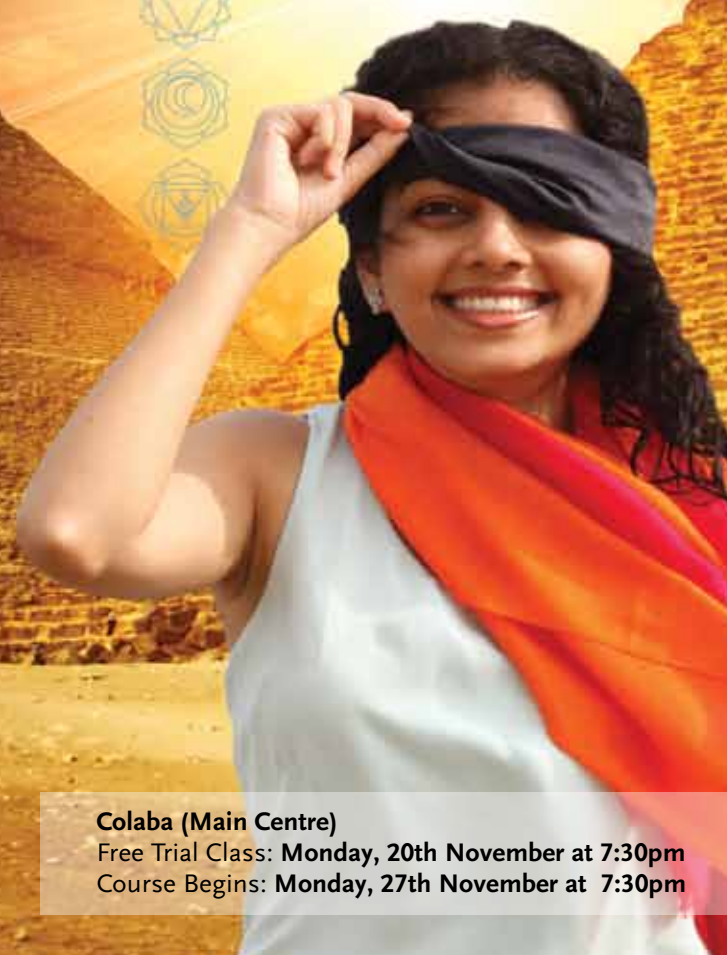
In the world of speedy connections, we have more advanced means to communicate than ever before. It helps to build relationships with our friends, family, and with every other human being. How we communicate is key to the meaning we are able to bring to these relationships, and in our lives. The new communication trends of the 21st century need a deeper sense of education!



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Evolution of Consciousness  
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Course Begins: **Monday, 27th November at 7:30pm**



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