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THE ACROPOLITAN

A Magazine on Philosophy, Culture & Volunteering

FEATURE

Philosophy of History

A New Model of Civilization

Life a Box of Cupcakes

Between Light and Darkness

In Conversation with Amish Tripathi

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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.**

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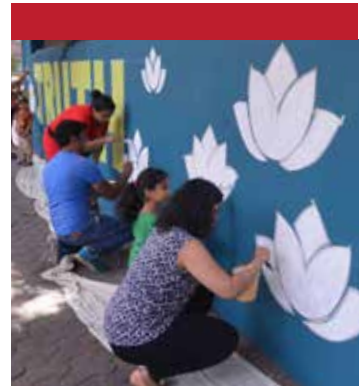
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From The Editorial Desk

Dear Reader,

The philosophical tradition proposes that it is by decoding our past, that we might discover vital keys to forge a better future. As if to be baked in an alchemical oven, mythology suggests that it will require the kneading of ourselves, through difficult challenges, to rise in consciousness, and express the best of our human potential.

Ancient civilizations emphasized the need to emerge from the darkness of materialism and ignorance, to the light of wisdom and Truth; the Ancient Greeks spoke of it as the need to tune into the music of Orpheus, the natural harmony of life.

Let us dare to imagine a new model of human civilization; one that is rooted in such a harmony, and the pursuit of Truth, in which we each Discover, Awaken, and Transform ourselves.

Hariato H Mehta, *Editor*.



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A New Model of Civilization

By Gilad Sommer

Director of New Acropolis USA (Midwest)

One of the most astounding things about ancient civilizations is the unity of their way of life. In the Art Institute of Chicago, for example, there is a beautiful stele from the Mayan ruins of Calakmul in Mexico. This stele presents a ruler in his task as a high priest, dressed in ceremonial garbs, holding ritual objects and clearly executing an important ritual. The ritual in question, we believe, is related to the closing of a ten-year cycle in the Mayan calendar, which was measured to such preciseness, that today we can determine the exact date of the ritual. This stele, therefore, is artistic in its presentation, religious in its significance, political in its authority and scientific in its measurements.

Ancient Egypt is another perfect example of the unity displayed by ancient civilizations. Religion and its consequent morality was seamlessly integrated in their culture. While religion was understood in varying depths, all people were religious to some degree. Politics and religion were inseparable. The Pharaoh was also the high priest, and participated in many ceremonies throughout the year. His authority to rule came from his obedience to the gods, and especially to Ma'at, the goddess of Justice. At the same time, Egypt was a highly scientific society. To build their magnificently aligned and constructed temples and pyramids, they must have had intimate knowledge of advanced engineering and astronomy, and used some type of technology. The fact is that to this day, there is a continuous debate among archeologists on how the Egyptians were able to realize these achievements. And finally, Egyptian art reflected both religion and politics, and was based on highly accurate mathematical proportions, which were strictly observed.

Inspired by these ancient civilizations, and with a vision of adapting their principles to our humanity, the philosopher and founder of New Acropolis, Jorge Livraga, proposed a pyramidal model of civilization based on four aspects of the human realm – Science, religion, politics and art.

Science, Religion, Politics and Art

In the simplest terms possible, science can be defined as the pursuit of truth. In the western world, influenced by a strong Aristotelian tradition, science focuses almost exclusively on the physical realm, the part of nature which can be perceived by the senses. In the East, however, there has been a long tradition, much more similar to the Platonic view, that the physical universe is essentially Maya, an illusion, in the sense that it is in constant flux, in constant movement.

Science can be defined as the pursuit of truth. Religion without science becomes dogma and prejudice. Science without religion, however, becomes a bureaucratic pursuit of the smallest details, lacking vision or any consideration of moral consequences.

According to this view our senses cannot be fully relied on as harbingers of truth. Therefore there is a strong scientific tradition which emphasizes the investigation of the inner, subjective world, through reflection and meditation. Obviously both these paths can be positive, if viewed as complementary, and if they serve the wellbeing of humanity above all financial or other personal interests that may be appropriate for commerce, but not for science.

Religion, which is usually contraposed with science, has got a significant amount of bad reputation in the last hundred years. It is frequently accused of all the evils of the world, of countless wars and genocides, discrimination and dogmatism.

It is true, without doubt, that many evils were realized "in the name of god". But to blame the idea and concept of religion for the evils carried out by its so-called adherents is as ridiculous as blaming science for the atom bomb, chemical warfare, digital hatred or drone strikes.

Both religion and science have been aspects of human existence since the beginning of time, and they have been used for good and evil, depending on those who claimed to use them. One can even say, that their misuse results exactly from separating the one from the other. Religion without science becomes dogma and prejudice. It focuses on literal interpretations and the thoughtless, fanatic observation of every comma in the sacred books. Science without religion, however, becomes a bureaucratic pursuit of the smallest details, lacking vision or any consideration of moral consequences. This leads the scientist to labor for big interests which don't exactly have the good of humanity in mind.

Without religion, many of the treasures of humanity, such as the Altamira cave art, the Pyramids, the Capela Sistina, the Bhagavad Gita and the Renaissance art, would not have existed, not to mention the works of the great idealists of the 20th century, such as Gandhi and Martin Luther King.

But what is religion? A wonderful definition comes from the pen of Albert Einstein: "A religious person is devout in the sense that he has no doubt of the significance of those super-personal objects and goals which neither require nor are capable of rational foundation ... In this



sense religion is the age-old endeavor of mankind to become clearly and completely conscious of these values and goals and constantly to strengthen and extend their effect. If one conceives of religion and science according to these definitions then a conflict between them appears impossible. For science can only ascertain what is, but not what should be..."

Or in a more general sense, as Jorge Livraga defines it – religion is everything that unites: Man with God and nature, man with man, man with himself or herself.

Thirdly, politics can be defined as the science and art of leadership. Science because it deals with human beings, who function according to certain natural laws, psychological mechanisms, and mental principles. Art, because it deals with human beings, not robots, human beings who have emotions, needs, and dreams, and are constantly in their own inner battle to harmonize the different aspects of their being.

Leadership is not manipulation, but to call out the higher aspects of those led, in a pursuit of a higher goal or ideal. Those who lead are not perfect human beings, but have the higher vantage point, they have

a vision. They can see a possible better future that others can't see and they have trained the skills, and honed the qualities required to personify this future, to be a living example of the vision they channel.

Without this vision, we don't have leaders but in the best case just a "boss", an administrator or a bureaucrat, and in the worst case... well, just look around.

Politics can be defined as the science and art of leadership. Leadership is not manipulation, but to call out the higher aspects of those led, in a pursuit of a higher goal or ideal. Those who lead are not perfect human beings, but have the higher vantage point, they have a vision.

Politics, just like religion, has got the "stink" of those who wielded it for their own personal ends. But let us not be mistaken, without the true use of politics, society is not possible. Any progress, any collective movement forward was enabled by true leaders, or in other words, people who wielded politics for its natural use.

Last but not least we have art. It is difficult to speak of art as a solitary concept, as each of us has her or his own tastes in art, which themselves change and evolve in time.

Nevertheless, for the sake of simplicity, we can define art as the pursuit of beauty. Some say that "beauty is in the eyes of the beholder", and while this is somewhat true, there are some things in life which are universally admired as beautiful.

I have never met a person who said that sunsets and butterflies are ugly, and I don't expect to do so. That is, while there are varying tastes and cultural backgrounds, there are probably also some universal aspects for beauty.

What can we definitely say about beauty? That it makes an impact, that it takes our breath away. It is not rational. It cannot be explained with words nor is it necessary to do so. In the presence of beauty, all words end, there's no need to point out or to put up a sign "clap, because this is beautiful" – beauty speaks for itself.

But to perceive beauty we need to have the inner walls removed, to allow that magnificent impact of beauty penetrate within us. If we are coarse within, then the eyes of the soul are covered by a veil of darkness which even beauty cannot penetrate.

And the artist? The artist is the lucky, or perhaps unlucky, chap who can directly perceive that beauty that comes from somewhere else, and to realize it through forms that can be perceived by the rest of us mortals.

Science, Religion, Politics and Art.

But there is still one thing missing. These four paths must be unified by the thread of philosophy, the love of wisdom, which is the only discipline that can show us that behind the words, behind the misunderstandings, these four elements share an important and essential element – the human being and his path.

So let us start imagining a different future. Because if we keep on sowing the same seeds we cannot expect different fruits.

Let us imagine a future where the different aspects of human life are united and not separated, a future where science, religion, politics and art, work together towards a better world. ★★★

Philosophy of History

A Key to the Past, the Present and the Future

By Julian Scott

There is an old Eastern saying which states:

*“The Past Time is the Present Time,
as also the Future, which, though it
has not come into existence, still is.”*

In the Eastern view of time, reality exists beyond the temporal realm and what we experience as separate stages are actually part of a simultaneous reality. This is an interesting concept, implying that the past still exists, the present is but a fleeting moment and the future already exists in the blueprint of nature. It would be one way of explaining the many instances of prophecy that have been recorded in history.

In the West, Philosophy of History is a more methodical discipline that studies the significance of human history, if any, and asks whether it has any purpose or meaning. It raises questions such as, are there any general principles, laws and patterns in history? Is there a direction or meaning in history? Can we use history to predict the future? What lessons can we learn from history? Let us look at these questions one by one.

Are there any general principles, laws and patterns in history?

We can start with the principle of unpredictability: in other words, figures arise or events occur at certain times in history and have a tremendous effect, but their appearance is rarely predicted. One example of this was the appearance of fascism in the 1930s. Surprisingly for us today, almost no political commentators saw it coming, and everyone was taken aback by its mass appeal. A similar case is that of certain outstanding historical figures, such as Alexander the Great or Napoleon. Who would have guessed that the ruler of a small Macedonian kingdom would have set out to conquer the world at the age of 18 and, by the time he died at the age of 33, had taken his campaigns as far as India? Or that an obscure Corsican would be crowned Emperor of France and bring havoc to Europe with his 'Napoleonic Wars'?

At the same time, however, there is a logic to history. Things do happen for a reason, or rather, for a variety of reasons. It is the multiplicity of factors that

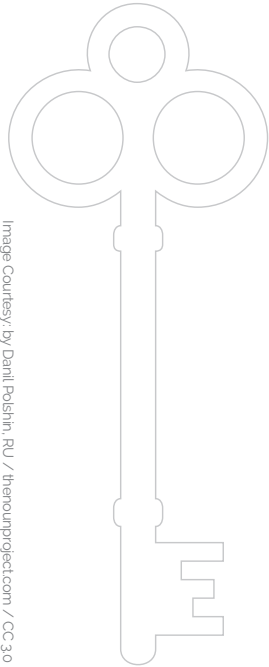


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makes history difficult to interpret and predict. Among the factors that influence the development of events are geography and climate (e.g. the presence of rivers is conducive to stable civilizations, while icy wastes or deserts are not), economics, philosophy and religion, to name but a few. How can we understand the development of Islamic civilization, for example, if we ignore the religious factor which was at the heart of its expansion?

Another principle is that of cyclicity. There are cycles of civilization which follow one another and grow out of one another. No civilization is permanent. In Europe, practically every nation has had its day of glory: the Spanish, the Austrians and Hungarians, the British... but then they were eclipsed by others.

What causes civilizations to die? This is another natural law. It is partly due to 'time' which erodes all things. But it is also partly due to the loss of values, in particular spiritual values, since a sense of transcendent meaning is what gives a human being, and therefore also a civilization its sense of purpose. If these values are lost, then the civilization will lose its *raison d'être* and, like a plant deprived of sunlight, will eventually wither and die.

Is there a direction or meaning in history?

Are there forces at work that are driving history? Most people in the past believed this, but it is an unfashionable idea today. Such forces have been called gods, providence, destiny, fate, karma... Today, they are often called 'economics'.

However, the belief in higher powers influencing human events is not an irrational one, because there are many events in history that could make us think there is some higher force other than chance at work. One example of this was when China had decided to invade Japan and an enormous fleet set sail which would certainly have defeated the Japanese. But a great storm unexpectedly blew up and sank almost the entire Chinese fleet. The Japanese called it the *Kami Kaze*, or Divine Wind (*Kami* are spirits in Japanese religion).

Today we tend to reject this possibility, not because it is illogical, but because, collectively, we do not believe in gods or spirits and we believe, on the other hand, that everything happens by chance. In antiquity, the belief in chance ruling all was generally regarded by its most eminent philosophers, such as Plotinus, as absurd.



Returning to the Eastern concept of time mentioned at the beginning of this article, if in some way the future already exists – in the archetypal world – then there would be forces guiding human history towards the fulfilment of those archetypes in time.

Can we use history to predict the future?

Will the global civilization of today survive the present crises (ecological, economic, demographic, spiritual, etc.)?

What generally happens in history is that many elements are lost, later to be replaced by very different forms.

As an example, we can look at the civilizations of Greece and Rome. The power of Greece collapsed when it was eclipsed by Alexander the Great in the fourth century BC. But it did not disappear completely. Many of its cultural elements, such as its art and religion, were passed to Rome, which incorporated them into its own life.

*There are cycles of civilization
which follow one another
and grow out of one another.
No civilization is permanent.*

Rome suffered a similar fate: when it fell, in the 5th-6th centuries AD, some of its forms (philosophical, cultural, institutional, etc.) were taken over by Christians in the West, and later by Muslims in the East. Some of these forms survived right up until the early 20th century or even later, such as architecture, law and systems of government and administration.

As for our own civilization, we could speculate that, unless everything is destroyed in some nuclear or natural catastrophe, some of the scientific and cultural elements of our present civilization will be transferred to a new civilization that will gradually take its place, but that new civilization will be based on a very different set of values.

We tend to think that the future will be an extension of the present, but history shows that this is never the case. Rome was very different from Greece. Medieval Europe was very different from Rome. And our technological civilization could not be more different from that of the Middle Ages. We could imagine that in the future people might entirely lose interest in gadgets and technology and become fascinated by parapsychology and mysticism – something almost unthinkable today – but if we study history we will see that outlooks do change in such radical ways.

What lessons can we learn from history?

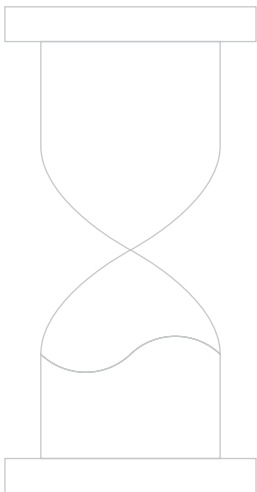
There are many lessons to be learned from the study of history. It is full of instruction about human nature, destiny, politics.. Will and Ariel Durant, in their book *The Lessons of History*, suggest that one tendency we can see in history is for wealth to become concentrated in the hands of a few, to the extent that the many become increasingly poor and a risk of a destructive revolution arises. We can see it happening right now on a global scale, with the gap between rich and poor growing every year. This has happened many times before in history and occasionally the situation has been rectified before it was too late. In many other cases, like the French and Russian revolutions, the forces of violence took over and caused widespread destruction and loss of life.




Another lesson of history is the hope and inspiration we can gain from it. Often people have the view that history is a catalogue of disasters, or (as Shakespeare's *Macbeth* says about life) 'a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing'. But there are figures in history who clearly work for the common good, rather than out of self-interest, even though sometimes their reforms are undone by people with vested interests. What we can learn from this is that while the wicked are powerful in the world and perhaps always have been, there are also those who selflessly fight against evil and strive, with some success, to re-establish the good.

Even in the case of military conquerors of whom we may not approve today, people like Alexander the Great or Napoleon, we can learn from them their spirit of 'nothing is impossible'. The famous battle of Cr cy, in the Middle Ages, for example, was won by Edward III despite the fact that he was numerically outnumbered by the French by five to one and most of his commanders advised him to turn back. Often such conquerors are undone in the end, and this would be another lesson to learn, the lesson that there are limits to human achievements in this world and that the great danger in such situations is 'hubris' or pride.

Beyond all the lessons of history, however, philosophy of history is about understanding the nature and destiny of humanity, and this implies going back to the philosophical question of the nature and destiny of the human being. ★★★





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before the tide of time.”** M K Gandhi

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 Philosophy
Culture
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Life: A Box of Cupcakes



Image Courtesy: by NordWood Themes / Unsplash / CC0

By Krutika Mehta

Ingredients:

1.5 cups all purpose flour
3 tbsp cocoa powder
1 tsp baking soda
1 cup caster sugar
½ tsp salt
5 tbsp oil
1 tbsp vinegar
½ tsp vanilla essence
1 cup water

Method:

- Preheat the oven to 180 degrees Celsius and grease an 8 in cake tin with oil and flour.
- In a clean mixing bowl, sieve the flour, cocoa powder and baking soda
- Add sugar and salt
- Whisk the dry ingredients well
- Separately mix the wet ingredients well
- Add the wet mixture into the dry mixture and mix well till everything is combined into a smooth batter.
- Pour the batter into the greased cake tin and bake for 30 minutes, or till an inserted toothpick comes out clean.

Those who love baking know the joy of seeing coarse ingredients come together to give birth to a cake. I am a baker by profession and absolutely love baking. Every time I put a tray of cupcakes to

bake, I find myself staring into the oven to catch a glimpse of their gradual metamorphosis. I love to see them rise and wait to be the first one to catch their delicious fragrance. I am a hopeless addict; often baking cakes, brownies, and cookies, even when I don't have orders to dispatch. The simple pleasure of sitting at a table, enjoying cake and coffee, to talk to a friend about how the day was, evokes within me the joy of having spread some love in my own small way.

A forkful of chocolatey goodness allows you to forget worries, and drop boundaries; you simply enjoy the moment, you are in the present. Have you ever found yourself worrying about the past or the future when relishing a good piece of cake? Hahaha... I haven't.

Interestingly, though full of love, baking does not accommodate impulsive changes, additions and subtractions. In a more technical manner, baking requires accurate measurements, the right mixing techniques, and just the right temperature. If any one of these is either overdone or not followed, the baking project fails, and one needs to start all over again. As a child I'd see my mother make

apple pies. I would observe how she leveled each cup and each spoon; nothing was left to approximation or chance. The first time I baked a batch of chocolate chip cookies, I decided to add, with a lot of love and a pinch of enthusiasm, a little more butter and a little more sugar than the recipe called for. With a lot of effort and patience, I made small cookie dough balls, placed them on the baking tray, which I slid into the pre-heated oven. As I anxiously waited, I saw the extra butter leak from each dough ball, making it all into one big messy slab. When I removed it from the oven, I discovered that the flour had over-baked because of all the extra butter, and the sugar had almost completely caramelized.

It was a disappointment. I thought to myself, "Why is it a failure despite so much love and effort?" I would not give up. I had to bake all over again. And yet again I failed, though not as badly as the first batch, because I had reduced my impulse to add more butter and sugar. And so I tried a third time. By now it was late at night and I decided to stick to the recipe. And voila! This was a good batch of cookies. Sometimes, such trials lead us to understand

that it is not about impulse. Instead we must objectively recognize what is needed, the right proportion of ingredients - not more and not less, but just right.

When one day, early on his path towards enlightenment, the great Siddhartha Gautama, was said to be meditating on the banks of a river, he overheard a Guru teaching his disciple how to play a veena. He said, "If the strings are too tight, they will break and there will be no music. If the strings are too loose, also one cannot play music. There must therefore be the right tension."

Isn't this teaching relevant to my cookie debacle? Clearly, the ingredients need to be added in just the right proportion, the right tension - not more, nor less. With the right tension, and with the help of an oven, an apparently magical transmutation happens, to give birth to crunchy delightful cookies, from a mushy chaos of dough.

As I contemplated this magical process, I realized that baking, much like an alchemical process, required the use of 4 core elements: Earth (flour), Water (water), Air (yeast to capture air), and Fire (from the oven). When these elements work together in harmony, an inner alchemical change takes place to give birth to a new and better version of the raw materials, as if the process unleashed a higher, invisible potential.

Interestingly, ancient traditions universally speak of the human being also, as made up of the same 4 elements: Earth (physical

body), Water (vital energetic aspect that animates the physical body), Air (our emotions and feelings), and Fire (the mental plane comprising our thoughts and opinions). For a process of transmutation, whereby a human being is able to truly unlock his own invisible potential, each of these elements needs to be prioritized, harmonized, moderated. Just like the excess butter, by dominating every other ingredient in the recipe caused a disaster, we unknowingly create "recipe disasters" in our own lives on a daily basis. How often we are enslaved by our emotions or our biases, clouding our objective judgment of reality, causing us to act irrationally!

We are who we are today as a result of past experiences; some have built within us fear, some cause us to hold on to grudges, and others have made us hopeless. But we can't let our past define us. While each has contributed to molding us as we are today, we must not blame the past for our incapacity to deal with our demons today. If I had continued to bake cookies with the fear of a failed outcome I would never have been able to bake a half decent batch. Similarly, if we were to handle each circumstance with the same subjective filters and habits, we should not be surprised to find that we experience similar disappointing outcomes. We wonder how it is that we face the same problems again and again, whether in personal relationships, in the workplace, or elsewhere in our lives. And we usually look for external solutions to 'fix' the circumstances. In reality, the

disorder lies deep within us; we are driven by fears, grudges, jealousy, or insecurities. And until we moderate them, and add the vital ingredient of love to purify them, we are doomed to repeat failed recipes!

Love here does not refer to impulsive or emotional sentimentality. Instead it refers to a principle that comprises justice, harmony, and altruistic objectivity. By this it helps unite the various elements. It steers away from Rajas or Tamas, and aspires towards Sattva, enabling us to look at life objectively, from the point of view of what is truly needed, rather than through the subjective lens of biases, opinions, judgments, or emotions.

Furthermore, just as in baking, individual ingredients are mixed, kneaded and put through the grueling heat of the oven, so too we can use our circumstances and challenges to help us transform. We can look at these challenges and circumstances as the kneading, exercising each aspect of the human constitution, preparing it for a shift from a material point of view to the spiritual. It will allow the restructuring of our personalities. In doing so, life becomes a dialogue. Challenges become opportunities. And everything starts making more sense. It is as if we will have found the elixir of life, that secret ingredient which keeps us young, filled with wonder, and free of fears, filters and biases. Perhaps this is why we are here: to transmute, so as to make the world a better place, one cookie at a time. ★★★

Between Light and Darkness

A lesson I have learned from Orpheus
By Sivan Barzilay

In recent months I have found myself walking between the light and darkness, on the seam line of the mysteries of life. People, both close and more distant, have passed away in circumstances that for some was a release from great suffering, while others caught me by surprise ... And death, as always, is as real as life itself. It is hard to escape or hide from it. It knocks on your door and stands in front of you; steady, terminal and clear. And you can do nothing but deal with it.

Through these days I encountered once again an ancient myth that over the course of history has been recounted repeatedly, as if it was trying to tell us something, teaching us about ourselves, and the simple truths of existence. The words of this myth, printed in black ink on white sheets, enchanted me for a few days and helped me understand something not only about Death, but mainly about Life.

It is the ancient myth about the hero Orpheus, son of the Muse Calliope. From the God Apollo, Orpheus received a musical instrument, a Lyre, a kind of great harp, and with time he grew up to become a master of song and music. Playing his Lyre, he mesmerized everyone that listened. The trees and stones tuned themselves to his music and animals fell silent when he played. The rivers diverted the direction of their flow and the waves of the sea became calm at the sound of his playing.

Orpheus wanted to marry the nymph Eurydice whom he loved intensely. But on their wedding day, Eurydice ran through a field and stepped on a venomous serpent that bit her and killed her on the spot. Orpheus received the sudden bitter message and fell into a deep mourning, refusing to be consoled. He stopped playing and stopped singing.

The days passed and his grief was so great that he decided to set off on a journey to convince Hades, the king of the underworld, to return his lost love.

Emitted from a fruit into
the darkness of the earth, the
seed comes back to light by
its own force.



On the way to the underworld, he sang and played his Lyre. His singing was so beautiful that the earth itself, captured by the magic of his poetry, opened up and allowed him to descend into the underworld. There he met Kharon, the sailor who helped him cross the Styx River that separates the land of life from the land of death. Cerberus, the four-headed monster, captivated by the magic of his music, allowed him almost effortlessly, to enter the domain where no living human had ever before entered.



In the underworld he met Hades and Persephone and put forth his request- to take Eurydice back to the world of Life. Seeing his great love, they decided to extend him a one-off act of kindness. He was allowed to take his beloved back, but only on the condition that he go before her, and that he does not turn his head towards her until they were completely out of the underworld.

Orpheus agreed and began the journey. They walked quietly, Orpheus first and Eurydice behind him. Slowly Orpheus started getting suspicious. He called out to her but as per her promise to Hades she did not answer. His doubt grew and alas, towards the end of the journey, when they entered a hole through which they passed out, Orpheus who crossed through first, in the heat of the moment, looked back and extended his hand to his beloved. In that moment, she drifted back and disappeared saying "Goodbye!"

In the mythology, a language of symbols, there are no coincidences, and the fact that the name Orpheus means "darkness of the night" can teach us something about this movement between darkness and light.

Anne Wroe, in her article "Why the Mythological Muse Haunts Us," suggests that this movement can serve as a metaphor for the journey of the seed on Earth: from light into darkness, and back to light again. Emitted from a fruit into the darkness of the earth, the seed comes back to light by its own force.

The great cycles of Nature occur again and again, inspiring us, confusing us and more than all, teaching us. It touches one of the greatest dilemmas of the human condition: LIFE – DEATH. We come to this world, learn its ways, develop relationships, and collect memories. Then at some time, with no prior preparation, we must leave it all behind...

Life does not have bugs; it is neither bad nor good. It is just Life. And for those who look more closely, Life might share a great story.

A few years ago, I went to offer my condolences to a family that had suddenly lost the father of the family. The youngest son told me something that stayed with me... He said that up to that moment he had felt that life is great and perfect, but that losing his father was so painful that he suddenly felt that there was a "bug" in the system ... it couldn't be... How could it be that day after day people lose those that they love so much...

But Life does not have bugs; it is neither bad nor good. It is just Life. And for those who look more closely, Life might share a great story. A story about who we are: an eternal being that arrived into this world and fell in love with its own reflection. So much so that the being believes that the reflection is him. But every time he holds on to one reflection, it is taken from him... and like a man standing on the seashore he tries to catch the waves. He remains sad, frustrated, lacking any real answers.

Till one day, after learning to let go of all illusion, he might realize that by letting go of what he is not, he might find what he is.

The story of Orpheus is very old but it seems that even today, Orpheus walks among us, a wandering musician, reminding us of something... he taps gently on our shoulders, refusing to be forgotten and teaches us about a life of Mystery, Love, Loss and Wisodm. ★★★

Bibliography:

<https://www.thedailybeast.com/ann-wroes-orpheus-why-the-mythological-muse-haunts-us>

<https://www.behindthename.com/name/orpheus>



Mythology as an Inner Compass

In Conversation with Amish Tripathi
By Vasant Sanzgiri



Amish Tripathi is the prolific author of the hugely successful Shiva Trilogy, the Ramachandra series and a nonfiction book *Immortal India*. His work has been recognized by numerous literary awards, and publishing benchmarks; the Shiva Trilogy is the highest selling book series in Indian publishing history. Amish, who goes by his first name only, seeks to be judged by his own karma, rather than that of his antecedents.

His books are steeped in familiar mythology, replete with symbolism, but with an emphasis on philosophy and a message that is surprisingly modern and liberal in its attitude towards gender, equality, and socio-politics.

Amish believes that "while truth is one, wise men speak of it as many" and that ancient traditions supported the ability to respect multiple, and even

opposing, points of view, originating from different religions, cultures, and communities. His writing evokes an Ancient India that was adaptable, inclusive, and open-minded; a heritage that valued the application of profound wisdom in almost every area of human endeavor.

With his effort to revive this spirit in a captivating and universally accessible template, Amish has revived the eagerness and curiosity to investigate our glorious roots more fully. He made the time to visit New Acropolis (Mumbai) for a *Friends of New Acropolis* event at which he was interviewed by Vasant Sanzgiri. Amish shared his own worldview, and offered insights into the imaginative world of his literature. Below are excerpts from the conversation.

VASANT SANZGIRI: In your entire body of writing you have chosen to re-imagine mythology and used mythological characters and myths as a framework for your stories. Can you tell us why?

AMISH: Mythology comes from the Greek root word *Mythos*, which is a story that hides a philosophical truth. The story itself is not so important; the purpose

is to discover the philosophy that lies underneath it. Why can't we just communicate the truth the way it is? Because there is no one truth which is good for everyone. You have to discover your own truth. The beauty of it is that the same story allows people to discover different philosophical truths. If you read the traditional version of the *Ramayana* or *Mahabharata*, different people draw different interpretations from it because they come with their own life experiences, and they need to learn a particular philosophy which will help them at that point of time. The best carrier for conveying these philosophies is a story because it makes it fun.

Let me give you an example of this. Ved Vyas compiled the *Vedas*. But Ved Vyas was really a title. It is believed that in every age of confusion, when the knowledge of the *Vedas* is lost, someone appears to revive it. And the one who does that for his or her age is called Ved Vyas. Krishna Dwaypayan was the Ved Vyas of our age. He knew this knowledge was extremely important, but he also knew that it would be really difficult and boring for most people to grasp. So the legend goes that he actually composed the *Mahabharata* so that he could convey the philosophy of the *Vedas* in a page-turning, fun story, accessible to everyone. Pure philosophy, like pure upanishadic philosophy or the platonic dialogues, very few people enjoy. But everyone enjoys a story. To me, that was a role model worth following.

All my books have some core philosophy. And I build the story as a wrapper to unravel and encourage discussions around the core principles. The philosophy at the heart of the Shiva Trilogy is: *What is Evil?* The answer is obviously not simple. The philosophy at the heart of the Ramachandra series is: *What is an Ideal Society?* Again the answer is not simple. It depends on what society wants at that point in time. These are things that we, as a society, in the last hundred years have not debated. Ideally, we may want a law abiding society. But sometimes laws and freedom are in contradiction with each other. So what is the ideal balance? India certainly doesn't have a problem of excessive compliance. Societies like in Japan, for example, could learn about rebellion. All these are issues that require debate; between violence and nonviolence, between traditions and finding new approaches, and to find the right balance between all of these.

The entire point of literature is to hold up this mirror, and to have these conversations, because that's how society will move forward. Everyone has their role to play. The job of a businessman is to create wealth, so that it can be used for the good of society. The job of leaders is to govern, so that there is order. The job of storytellers and philosophers is to trigger public conversation so that society can move in certain directions. If a story has certain resonance at a point of time, it means that the society has found what it needs to move forward. An ideal society is not a destination,



An ideal society is not a destination, it's a journey. There never is a final ideal society. That doesn't exist.

it's a journey. There never is a final ideal society. That doesn't exist.

VASANT: In your Ramachandra series Lord Rama represents an archetype. What is the importance of archetypes and what relevance could they have for us today?

AMISH: One of the reasons I think the pagan approach had the concept of multiple gods and goddesses was that there are different messages that are needed for different people and different eras. Lord Ram is called *maryada purshottam*, often erroneously translated as 'the perfect man', which is actually an incomplete translation. *Purush ottam* means the perfect man. *Maryada* is honour, law, the right way to live. So *maryada purshottam* means 'the ideal follower of laws'. What the archetypes teach us through the lives of all our gods and goddesses, is the strengths and challenges of each archetypal approach. So if Lord Rama personifies the approach of the ideal follower of laws, then what are the challenges of this approach? Obviously it is very good for society; it makes for a society that is very fair, just and well run. But there are obviously huge challenges in personal life. This is what we must learn from, and apply into our own lives.

VASANT: Your stories are full of symbolism. You have used symbols on the covers of your book, and there are symbols that head each chapter. What is the philosophical significance of these symbols?

AMISH: Symbols are essential. They are a way to communicate something very complex with conciseness. But you have to know the background behind it. For example, what does this mean [folding hands in *Namaste* gesture]?

Today we are losing the power of symbols because we are losing traditions, and failing to retain cultural contexts.

This is *Namah-Te* and it enjoins and becomes *Namaste*, which means 'the divine in me recognizes the divine in you'. It's a verbal symbol that teaches you humility, because you are respecting the divine in someone else. And traditionally you didn't just do *namaste* to just other human beings; but also to animals, to the river, to everything. Because you recognise the divine in everything. This instinctively instills humility within you.

For the person receiving the symbol *namaste*, it's also a challenge to discover the divine within you. Just because you have it in you, doesn't mean that you have actually discovered it, or that you are living it. You may have been blessed with that potential, but you still have to work to actualise it. So, this one word or gesture carries so many layers of meaning. This is the power of symbols. The point, however, is that these symbols can only be understood in a particular cultural context. Regretfully, today we are losing the power of symbols because we are losing traditions, and failing to retain cultural contexts. Someone who doesn't know the beauty behind the word *namaste* will just see it as another way of saying 'hello', which is not what it is at all.

VASANT: As a lover of knowledge, and an author of an oeuvre that you hope your readers can learn from, could you throw some light on the traditional Indian systems of learning compared to the modern Western educational system?



AMISH: There were essentially three broad systems: the *gurukuls*, the *pathshalas*, and the *madrasas*. There was one of these in practically every village, and the teacher-student ratio was usually no more than 1:5. What is very interesting is that there was actually a very high male to female ratio. There were long hours and no vacations. And think of the texts that they taught! For example, the foundational mathematics text that was used across India for nearly a thousand years before the British destroyed our education system was called *Lilavati*. Here is an insight of the way a good education system balances your left and right brain.

Lilavati is actually a mathematical text composed by Rishi Bhaskar Acharya. He wanted to teach mathematics to his daughter, whose name was Lilavati. But like most youngsters, she thought maths was the most boring subject in the world. To make it interesting for her, he wrote up the theorems in the forms of poems. So, here is a Sanskrit poem which you can actually enjoy as beautiful poetry, and at the end of it, without realizing it, you have actually learnt a theorem. Think of the beauty of this; you are developing a creative right brain, learning beautiful Sanskrit poetry in a playful use of words and numbers, as well as developing the left brain with logical constructs.

The *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* used to be standard texts too. When Sita ma was kidnapped, Sugriv tells his messengers to search for her. In a very long section he describes in detail the routes north, south, east and west, naming towns, rivers, lakes, islands in the ocean, etc. This is but a geography lesson in the form of a story.

I'm not deriding the logical rational approach, which is needed and it is important. The problem with our modern educational system is an over-dependence on it. The downside is that the right brain approach, using intuition as a way of discovering knowledge, has been ignored. This was the way our education

system was, making learning enjoyable, balancing both the left and right brain and this is what we really need to revive.

VASANT: Today, unfortunately we have separation in almost every facet of our life and our society. Yet, as philosophers, our quest is to move towards unity. How can we accomplish that, given the challenges we face at every turn in our lives?

AMISH: What do you mean by unity? Does unity require that every flower has to convert into a rose? That would actually be terrible, because it would be violence to the sunflower, it would be violence to the lotus. Or is it that every flower has the right to exist and find its own beauty, while being aware that there is a connecting thread that strings them together? How you define unity is extremely important; we must discover that there is something common between us, but I don't have to lose my individuality. That distinction is extremely important. If the concept of unity leads to hatred in your heart for someone else then you're on the wrong path. If you can manage that distinction, then you can be a source of positivity in the world. Find the commonality, but celebrate the differences as well.

There is a line I have quoted many times of Lord Ram, which means 'any man, any woman, any transgender, any living being, any plant, any animal, you give up deceit, come to me and you are all my people.'

Such a wonderful, open, inclusive line. We can use this to fight for the equal treatment of everyone, regardless of the personal choices that they make, and not force your choice on anyone else. Hating someone today for what their forefathers may have done is ridiculous. This is not some government problem or media problem, this is a social problem so all of us have to do our bit. Each and every one of us has to make our own personal changes and try and impact people that we interact with personally.



Audience: In the *Ramachandra* series, there's an intimate moment between Sita and Rama and the theme of the conversation suddenly shifts to *Dharma*. Why do your books talk so much about civic and social responsibility? Is love not equally important?

AMISH: Modern storytelling, including the storytelling in Hindi movies, is inspired by Aristotle's *Poetics*. These storytelling styles were often driven by human emotions and human experiences. So love stories and different aspects of love have always been a big part of the Greek Tragedies and closer to home, in Hindi movies. But this is one form of storytelling.

The Indian style of storytelling always had different explorations of *Dharma* at its heart. Even love was explored through *Dharma*; whether it is *Dharmic love* or *A-Dharmic love*.

The entire point was to discuss things which you can apply in your own life. If you see *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* from the perspective of a love story, you will be disappointed. But if you see it from the perspective of essentially an exploration of *Dharma*, then much of the story starts making sense. The perspective of the storyteller is to force you to explore some philosophies that you can learn from, and apply in your own life.

Audience: Throughout your talk with us today you've constantly spoken of how we should use the archetypes and the myths to learn from and translate into our everyday lives. Can you give us one vivid example of how to take a metaphor and transform it into a practical action that can engender sustainable change?

AMISH: Many of you might be aware of the *Sagar Manthana* story. The *Devas* churn the ocean to bring out treasures that are good for society: *Amrit*, *Kamadhenu*, *Kalpavriksha*, *Mahalakshmi*, etc. The *Devas* and the *Asuras*, in partnership, churn the ocean with the mountain, with Lord Vishnu, in his *Kurma* form, forming the base.

This entire story is actually metaphorical. It actually describes the process of change. Any process of change needs a partnership from opposing forces. Although the *Devas* and the *Asuras* are completely on opposite sides and hate each other, they partner up to start the process of change. And in a process of change, various good things will emerge. But the first thing to emerge is *Halalala*, the poison. And that is a natural result of change; some poison will come up at the beginning, but someone needs to be the Lord Shiva to drink up that poison for the good of society.



Audience: You used to be an atheist earlier. Do you believe in God now?

AMISH: My personal belief is that Lord Shiva, Lord Rama, Lady Sita, Lord Krishna, Lady Sati were all our ancestors. I believe that the difference between them and us is that they discovered the divine within themselves, while we are yet to discover the divine within ourselves. I believe that their blood flows in all our veins, and I find this belief very inspiring because then, we have to be worthy of our bloodline, our lineage and our sacred heritage. ★★★

Friends of New Acropolis is a circle of liked-minded thinkers and doers, who share a love of philosophy in action. It is a space for meaningful exploration and expression of Culture, which is a key part of Life through which the highest aspects of our selves can be expressed in the world. *Friends of New Acropolis* offers twelve carefully curated monthly events each year, around Philosophy, Culture & Volunteering. For inquiries: <http://acropolis.org.in/friends/>

Schedule Of Public Events

www.acropolis.org.in

COLABA

Talk

**6 APR
SATURDAY**

6-8 pm
Free Admission



Being a Knight of the 21st Century

Knights much beyond their steeds and armours exemplified qualities such as courtesy, bravery, efficacy and loyalty. Learning from their tales of heroism, how can we be knights and ladies of the 21st Century?

KHAR

Talk

**6 APR
SATURDAY**

6-8 pm
Free Admission



By Sammie Vasquez / Unsplash / CCO

Be Heroic: Dare to Change

How might we rise to the challenge of empowering real change in the world around us? What really needs to change? And what might we do in our own individual capacities?

PUNE

Talk

**6 APR
SATURDAY**

6-8 pm
Free Admission



By Olz / pixabay / CCO

The Hercules Within Me

Hercules overcame 12 daunting challenges in pursuit of the truth. How does this mythology tell a story of incredible spiritual strength? And can we discover the Hercules within us and feel empowered to battle our challenges as heros?

Schedule Of Public Events

www.acropolis.org.in

PUNE

THURSDAY

Open House

11 APR

Course Starts

18 APR

COLABA

MONDAY

Open House

20 MAY

Course Starts

27 MAY



7:30-9:30 pm
Pre-Registration
Required

Living Philosophy – Discover Awaken Transform

This is a 15-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.

Testimonials:

“The LP course is a real awakening. You learn from various cultures like ancient Egypt, Greece, China, India... and your eyes are opened to essential insights from around the world. But the most significant journey is the one you make within yourself, inspired by these teachings.” –Sangeeta Iyer

“New Acropolis’ Living Philosophy course opened my mind and heart to a whole new way of viewing the world and living life. It brought back a sense of wonder, meaning and purpose, and showed me that each one of us can be so much more than what we limit ourselves to.” –Trishya Screwvvala

“After joining this course, I had a different perspective towards life. The ancient myths and wisdom, which were just stories for me till then, slowly started making sense and I started connecting them with my own life. This gave me a glimpse of how much I need to work on my internal growth, in order to become a better person. This course was the ignition to change the course of my life. :)” –Samarth Shetty

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PUNE

Talk

**13 APR
SATURDAY**

6-8 pm

Free Admission



By pxhere / CCO

**The Courage to Lead -
Leading Ourselves**

*"Truth alone will endure, all the rest will be swept
away before the tide of time"*

- M.K. Gandhi

In a world of rapid change and constant ethical challenges, have we almost given up hope for a leadership that will enable us to build a better tomorrow? Maybe we need to ask ourselves, who is a true leader and where will he/she come from? Or maybe the answer lies closer home, maybe that leader is us!

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Talk

**20 APR
SATURDAY**

6-8 pm

Free Admission



By Noah Stillman / Unsplash / CCO

Don't just Survive, Live!

Philosophical traditions through the ages have all emphasized the "meaningful life". They suggest that the human life is a great adventure if we develop ourselves to live with this attitude.

Schedule Of Public Events

www.acropolis.org.in

COLABA

Talk
27 APR
SATURDAY
 6-8 pm
 Free Admission



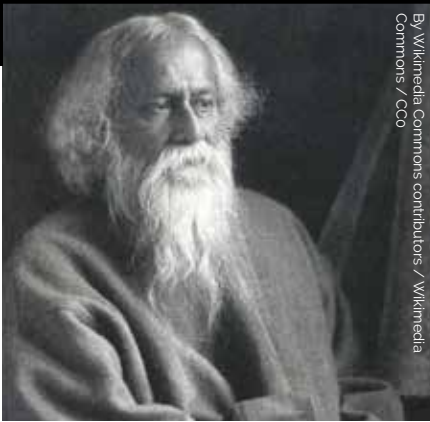
By Patrick Fore / Unsplash / CCO

Embracing Change

Change can be scary and exciting in equal measure. When we faced with change of any kind we tend to fear and resist it forgetting that without change growth isn't possible. Can we learn to work with change in a better way? Is it possible to discover the excitement and depth in change and bring it to our life?

KHAR

Talk
4 MAY
SATURDAY
 6-8 pm
 Free Admission



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Tagore: The Poet Philosopher

The man of a thousand words has captured the essence of existence with such simplicity. Join us for a journey with Tagore as we explore his works to challenge our perceptions of freedom, fear and happiness.

PUNE

Talk
4 MAY
SATURDAY
 6-8 pm
 Free Admission



By Kal Visuals / Unsplash / CCO

Epictetus on freedom

Today freedom is measured based on the number of choices available to us. But what is true Freedom? Isn't it the ability capability to defeat the obstacles of our own desires? Epictetus was born as a roman slave, but was considered a freest man in Athens. Let us also, learn to be free.

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Talk

11 MAY
SATURDAY

6-8 pm
 Free Admission



By James Wheeler / Pixels / CCO

Re-discovering Ancient Temples

What truly is a Temple? How exactly does a Temple facilitate an interaction between Man and The Divine? Let's embark on a voyage to visit ancient temples from various parts of the Ancient World.

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Talk

18 MAY
SATURDAY

6-8 pm
 Free Admission



By sasint / pixabay / CCO

Education for Real Change

Traditional wisdom suggests that the process of education is not to add knowledge but to bring out what lies latent within the human being. We will see together tenets of a holistic education which doesn't end in school, but is a life-long pursuit.

PUNE

Talk

18 MAY
SATURDAY

6-8 pm
 Free Admission



By geralt / pixabay / CCO

Un-limit Yourself - Lessons from Da Vinci

Full of wonder, filled with questions and with a sharp imagination, this iconic figure combined philosophy, arts, science and technology to be titled the 'Renaissance man'. Can we learn to look beyond the apparent for the essential of life and nature?

Schedule Of Public Events

www.acropolis.org.in

COLABA

Talk

**25 MAY
SATURDAY**

6-8 pm
Free Admission



Da Vinci - The Renaissance Philosopher

Da Vinci and other Philosophers, Scientists, Astronomers, Artists of the Renaissance defied circumstances and revived Beauty and Wisdom once again in Society. This year we celebrate 500 Years of Leonardo da Vinci and we will explore together how we may usher in a golden age in our own times!

COLABA

Talk

**1 JUN
SATURDAY**

6-8 pm
Free Admission



By: Briegerkoeppe / Wikimedia Commons / CC BY-SA 3.0

Lessons from Plato's "Allegory of the Cave"

Plato's "Allegory of the Cave" guides us on our role as citizens. We will see the various parts of the parable and its profound message to enable us to be better human beings to build a better society.

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KHAR

Talk

1 JUN
SATURDAY

6-8 pm
 Free Admission



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Karma: A Dialogue with Life

What is Karma? Can it be changed? In what way can we apply the Law of Karma to our daily life? Join us on the exploration of this Natural Law.

It is imperative to understand Karma to uncover our true spiritual identity, which is defined by our progress on the Path.

PUNE

Talk

1 JUN
SATURDAY

6-8 pm
 Free Admission



By KfirHof / pixabay / CC0

From Mundane to Mindful Living

Are we existing or are we living? Are we able to tell the difference? Let's explore how to break stale habits and build the right attitude.

KHAR

Talk

15 JUN
SATURDAY

6-8 pm
 Free Admission



By Tibbet Nation / Wikimedia Commons / CC BY PD

Symbolism of the Mandala

As a language of symbols, Mandalas consist of squares and triangles and circles. These visual elements symbolize a divine order of unity and harmony. A vast variety of Mandalas are used in diverse cultures, suggesting its universal use as a tool for a spiritual journey. How might a Mandala inspire better living?

Schedule Of Public Events

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PUNE

Talk

**15 JUN
SATURDAY**

6-8 pm

Free Admission



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Reviving the Art of Communication

In the age of fast paced technology in communication, are we communicating more effectively – with more meaning? Let us revive the art of listening and the art of speaking, so that we can learn to connect better with our own self, with others and with life.

COLABA

Talk

**22 JUN
SATURDAY**

6-8 pm

Free Admission



By M. Les / Wikimedia Commons Images / CC BY PD

Mesopotamia and the Legend of Gilgamesh

The land of the two rivers was the birth place of king Gilgamesh, 1/3 human and 2/3 god. His magnificent story can be relevant for us even today..

Join us as we explore how this legend from Mesopotamia holds an invaluable lesson for us today.

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