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Qawwali: Call of the Spirit

FEATURE

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A Lifetime of Architecture:
In Conversation with BV Doshi

Interview with the International
President of New Acropolis

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FROM THE EDITORIAL DESK

Dear Reader,

In this issue we bring to you something truly special – an interview with the International President of New Acropolis, who addresses questions about various aspects of the organization, the founding ideals and goals of New Acropolis, and reiterates the need for and value of philosophy in today's times.

The path of philosophy offers the ability to bring a coherent meaning to our existence.

Many ancient civilizations lived in alignment and harmony with nature. While in some parts of the world there is still an attempt to hold on to this way of life, for many of us we can only see some remnants of this as part of our cultural legacy, as some festivals that mark and celebrate specific moments in nature. Could we use these celebrations as an opportunity to renew that connect and alignment with nature which our ancestors seemed to have?

Today, in the cycle of seasons as we move from autumn towards winter, it perhaps offers an invitation for us to go within. Instead of continually looking outwards, in an attempt to seek validation from others, we must define our own parameters to measure success. We must choose the meaning we wish to give our lives. We must dare to Discover, Awaken, Transform.

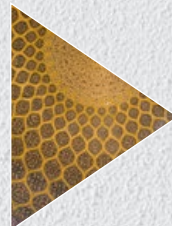
Malini Nair
Editor

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QAWWALI: CALL OF THE SPIRIT

By Harianto Mehta

This article serves only as an introduction to the legendary origins, metaphysical purpose, and the traditional form used in the practice of Qawwali. It would be impossible to capture the cultural nuances, complex history, and social impact of the genre in this brief work, but I hope to share some principal themes that have emerged from my own amateur investigation, to help the reader embark on their own exploration of this magnificent Sufi practice.

Bridge to The Divine

The metaphysical and creative property of sound has been widely recognized across cultures worldwide, since time immemorial. The Indian tradition refers to this creative power as *Kriyashakti*. And a similar idea is found in the use of the pop culture word

abracadabra, which is said to originate from ancient Hebrew, and loosely translates to, "I create, as I say." But perhaps the most well-known scriptural reference emerges from the Book of Genesis revered by every biblical tradition; In order to initiate the magical process of cosmic creation, "God said, 'Let there be Light'; and there was Light." Here, the Word, the vocalized declaration of Divine Will, acts as the bridge between the eternal and divine realm of the Archetypes, and the created transient world of form. It follows, therefore, that many traditions such as the Bhakti movement in India, and Gospel in the West, have relied on sound, whether in the form of music or chant, as part of the religious practice, to elevate consciousness, in order to reconnect from the world of form, to the divine.

*Aan Roz Ke Rooh-e Aadam, On the Day of the Covenant, when Adam's soul,
Aamad Bah Badan, Entered his earthly body,
Guftand Dar Tan Dar Aa, It was ordered, 'Enter the body!'
Niyaamad Dar Tan, But Adam's soul refused to enter the body,
Khoobaan-e Qudsiyaan, Beautiful celestial beings,
Bah Lahn-e Daawood, In the divine melody of David,
Guftand Dar Tan Dar Aa Then sang, 'Enter the body',
Dar Aamad Dar Tan And moved by this celestial song, Adam's soul entered his body.*

This verse used in Qawwali was composed by Hazrat Amir Khusrau, and captures the suffering of Adam's soul; the suffering of separating from his true home, and immersing himself into the limitation of a physical body. He resisted, until being lured into the manifest world, moved by angelic music. Some may recognize in this the need to push beyond the boundaries of our comforts, in order to gather experience and evolve. Just as music caused the spirit to descend, the Qawwal uses music to ascend, back to this eternal home.

Among these traditions is the rich culture of Qawwali, generally associated with a mystical form of Islam called Sufism, as practiced by sects in the Indian sub-continent since at least the 14th century. Sufis believe in the ability to encounter and experience Divinity by engaging with Life, through a process of education, or formation. It demands purification (*saaf* in Arabic, and hence the name Sufi) meant to lead to the dissolution of the ego and transparency of the personality, in order to perceive Truth, or God.

Ishq inspires the lover to totally annihilate oneself, to merge into, and become one with. It is described as an elevated state of consciousness, of being, of a shared sense of belonging.

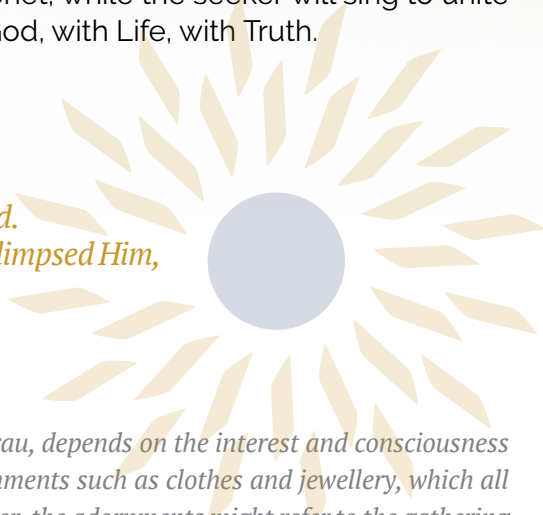
Ishq: A Force of Union

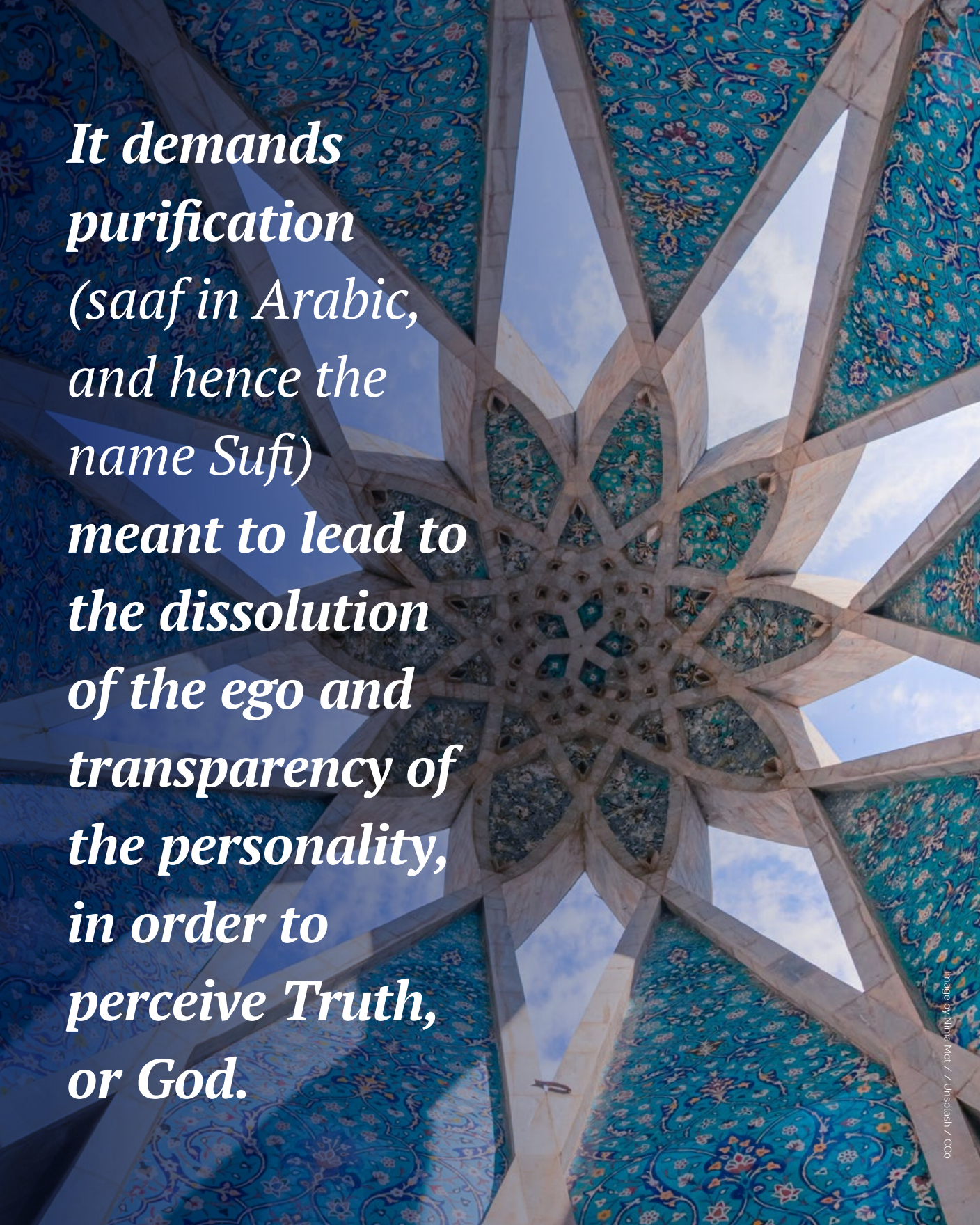
What exactly is Qawwali? Is it a musical style? Is it a literary tradition? Is it a part of the religious

practice? Or is it a philosophical path? It seems that the underlying premise of Qawwali is that it is a celebration of *Ishq* - usually, but insufficiently, translated as Love. It is not *pyar*, nor even *mohobbat* - other words for love that indicate a deep attachment, or desire to be together with the object of one's affection. In contrast, *Ishq* inspires the lover to totally annihilate oneself, to merge into, and become one with. (2) It surpasses affection, and is not just a passing emotion. It is described as an elevated state of consciousness, of being, of a shared sense of belonging. In literature, it is often described as a trance, or a state of intoxication, in which the ego dissolves, and the lover is lost, disidentified with the external and transient world of illusory forms. The poetry used is often deliberately left ambiguous; a man might dedicate the words to his beloved lady, a father might dedicate the same words to his beloved daughter, a devout follower might dedicate the words to a prophet, while the seeker will sing to unite with God, with Life, with Truth.

*Apni chhab banaike, Myself I adorned
mein to pee ke paas gayi To visit my Beloved.
Aur jab chhab dekhi piyu ki, But when my eyes glimpsed Him,
mein toh apni bhool gayi Myself I forgot.*

The meaning of these couplets, composed by Hazrat Amir Khusrau, depends on the interest and consciousness of the listener. A man of the world invests in vain external adornments such as clothes and jewellery, which all look pale in comparison to the beauty of his beloved. For the Seeker, the adornments might refer to the gathering of knowledge and titles, which become meaningless when one becomes a Disciple, to glimpse the wisdom of a Teacher, and realize the depth of one's own ignorance. To the Mystic, the adornments might in fact be virtues, acquired through a process of purification, to become the best that one can be. But just a glimpse of the Divine, of the Archetypes, and one perceives the Great Path to Perfection yet left to tread.





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This is not cerebral and it is said that it is not enough to understand; it necessarily requires effort and experience. It demands active sharpness of the mind to clearly grasp the ideas hidden within the symbolic language. It requires patience to repeatedly listen to a single poetic couplet to reflect and deepen each idea such that it impacts the soul. "The Qawwal often dwells on one phrase or sentence, indicating both the obvious

as One?" (1) This seemingly simple approach echoes a timeless and universal teaching: Life is One - an integrated unit comprising both the spiritual and material, purusha and prakriti, Theos and Chaos. It is improper, and some might even say impossible, to separate the two. And perhaps, the particular role of the human being is to become the bridge between the two, by harmonizing the apparent opposition between them.

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and hidden content by emphasizing and repeating various words and syllables, taking the audience into the discovery of hitherto not obvious meanings till all meanings are disclosed. A spinning wheel thus changes from a household instrument into a wheel of life..." (3) And with the help of the right *raga* (melodic structure in Hindustani classical music) to accurately capture the needed sentiment, if done correctly, at its climax, the practitioner might succeed in inducing *kaifiyat*, a state of consciousness of the Sacred, which permeates all Life. Without *kaifiyat*, celebrated Qawwal Fareed Ayaz asserts that it is possible to become an entertainer, but not a Qawwal. (1)

In his inquiry about the characteristics of this state of intoxication, an interviewer asks Fareed Ayaz how he manages to strike a balance between his search for *kaifiyat*, and his casual day-to-day obligations and activities. Ayaz answers with a thought-provoking question in response: "Why do you take One and see them as two? Dear sir, why don't you see the two

The use of music is critical in this endeavour. Ayaz explains that without Music, every other science would fall apart. He offers as an example that if the maker of the atomic bomb might have been familiar with the wisdom of Music, he would not have used that knowledge for destruction. Good music compels a human being to progress, to evolve. It inspires the human being towards the Good - physically, psychologically, and spiritually - and that any other use of music is perhaps profane, reduced to sensual entertainment. (1)

Hence, purists such as Fareed Ayaz insist that Qawwali was never meant to be a profession, nor a form of entertainment. Only with degradation, did the genre devolve, hollowed of its metaphysical purpose. The word Qawwali is an adaptation from Arabic, of a word that translates to the *utterance of sayings, to say what others [wise masters] have said*. In some sense it seems similar to the concept of a *satsang*, a gathering for philosophical and/or religious discourse. In the early Islamic

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tradition, such gatherings were reserved for scholars who assembled for sessions called *samaa* that were often commissioned by royal patronage. However, in order to make such discourse more accessible for the common man, the revered Sufi Amir Khusrau is credited with adapting the content and the musical medium, to enable the masses to partake in the investigation of the underlying philosophical principles.

Legendary Origins

To explain the origins of Qawwali, one legend goes that virtuoso classical singer Pandit Gopal, accompanied by ten thousand disciples, once arrived to the court of Alauddin Khilji, in order to perform a piece comprising 28000 Sanskrit verses, using 6 especially difficult styles of music. He challenged the monarch to present any other singer from his realm that might be able to offer a contest, or else proclaim Pandit Gopal the foremost artist of the kingdom. The performance lasted several weeks, and tradition claims that the 28000 verses described the extraordinary feats of various Hindu deities: My god carries the Sun on his little finger, what does your god do? My god eats fires, what does your god do? My god walks on water, what does your god do? Not wanting to bestow a title to a Hindu, at the conclusion of the performance, Khilji was perplexed. Firstly because of Pandit Gopal's spellbinding musical ability, but also because Khilji was unable to understand Sanskrit and therefore had no idea what he really was being challenged to.

It is said that Khilji approached the wise master Nizamuddin Auliya, who directed his prodigious disciple, accomplished musician and Sanskrit scholar, Amir Khusrau to offer a worthy contest.

Khusrau agreed on the condition that he will first listen to Pandit Gopal's presentation from behind a curtain, so as not to shame his master in case he is unable to match up. After all 28000 verses were once again performed, Khusrau was granted a few weeks to rehearse his response. 12 young boys were identified and trained in 6 new musical styles composed by Khusrau especially for the occasion, and only 28 verses were compiled as the appropriate contest to Pandit Gopal. Their content: The Sun that your god carries on his little finger, the fire that your god eats, the water on which your god walks...these were all made by my God! This, it is said, was the start of the Khusravi Qawwali tradition – the only form of Qawwali that has survived to date.

Astonished at Khusrau's delivery, Pandit Gopal humbly conceded defeat. Amir Khusrau is said to have declared that in reality Pandit Gopal was a far more accomplished maestro of music. And that the real cause of Khusrau's victory was his love and obedience to his teacher, rather than his ego.

Khusravi Qawwali became a powerful tool that fought the rigidity of the caste system of the times. Those of the lowest castes, banned from any spiritual practice, barred from education and music, and outcast from mainstream society, were offered a better life by embracing Islam, through an inclusive message of love through Qawwali.

Birth of a Qawwal

The tradition demands 4 aptitudes for one to become a Qawwal. First is the mastery over Hindustani classical music, the canvas upon which the Qawwal will embark onto his spiritual voyage. In addition, the aspirant must

strive to become a polymath, cultivating both an interest and basic competence in various faculties of life, be it culture, politics, the sciences, technology, etc. The third element is awareness; the ability to observe and reflect, to discern the essential from the superfluous. And finally, *ma'arifat*, or Gnosis, a sort of inherent inner knowledge, the perception of the sacred and of a connection to the Creator, unattainable through external means.

Protocol and Structure

As if in prayer, the Qawwals and the audience, are all seated bare foot on the floor, with the lead singer usually facing the shrine, surrounded by musicians and junior singers that maintain an incessant rhythmic clapping.

Protocol requires that the audience express their elation through verbal exclamations to communicate the impact of the poetry and music. And there exist particular rules that dictate the dignified manner in which to distribute money as blessings, reward, or gratitude.

An evening begins with various works in praise of God, the Prophet, or various saints. Although the total duration of each piece can

vary from a few minutes to up to 2 hours, every Qawwali is generally composed of 4 elements. An instrumental opening sets the *raga* and the mood, and it is followed by "the *alap*, that is, only the lead singer invoking God, Prophet, and the *pir* [saint] through a mystical couplet, and is marked by complete silence from other members of the group and audience, setting the atmosphere". (3) This poetic couplet is usually recited and contains theological significance. The main poetry is then finally introduced in the chosen *raga*, with the rhythmic pace gradually escalating through the performance to reach a climax. Every time a verse resonates with the Qawwal or strikes a chord with a member of the audience, it is repeated a few times.

A successful presentation will often end with one specific work called *Rang* composed by Hazrat Amir Khusrau, which celebrates the incorporeal arrival of the beloved. The gathering stands, to receive the long-awaited beloved, and the poetry declares that the fabric [of one's own existence] is freshly dyed with jubilant colour. Union has been achieved, the purpose of Qawwali attained, and so the gathering comes to a close.



*Maati ke tum deeware
Jo sunyo hamri baat
Aaj milaawara mohe piya ka
Jo jagyo saari raat*

*O lamps of clay
Listen to my request
Tonight my sweetheart is coming to me
So burn bright all night*

*Aaj rang hai ri maa
Rang hai ri
More khaajah ke ghar rang hai ri
Aaj sajan milaawara more aangan mein*

*Today there is jubilant colour, O mother!
Jubilant colour!
At my Khwaja's home, there is jubilant colour!
Today, my sweetheart has come to my home*

Decline

With time, however, it seems that there has been a gradual dilution of the religious orientation of the practice; instead the impact of the genre's musicality, its use for artistic innovation, and its social aspects have gained attention. Practitioners became preoccupied with booking concerts, and to please audiences they took liberties with the sanctity of the content, and assimilated arbitrary musical styles that are in vogue, endlessly repeating familiar literature and creating disjoint montages, in order to appeal to the masses.

Dam a dam mast Qalander Ali dam dam de andhar

Perhaps one of the most familiar refrains of a popular Qawwali composed by Baba Bulleh Shah, in this couplet, most appreciate the words as a representation of a drumming sound. This, however, is to reduce a deeply religious reference, to give center-stage to the sensual, the musical – at the cost of the philosophical message. In reality the word dam translates to blood, hence: “My blood is the blood of the Master, Ali resides in every drop” - a declaration of a common spiritual lineage and destiny with the Master.

That having been said, Qawwali has indeed become popular in recent years as a musical genre, performed in celebrated recital halls across the globe by exponents such as Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, Abida Parveen, and the Sabri Brothers duo. Bollywood has further contributed to its commercialization, going as far as fusing the style with electronic elements to further emphasise the musical form, at the cost of the substance and primary aim.

Furthermore, the interest of participants has also drifted away from the transmitted spiritual

message, eclipsed by the sensual rhythmic stimulation that is sought, sometimes even embellished by what might be regarded as inappropriate dancing and alcohol. By and large, audiences have become passive consumers, no longer able to understand the subtle meaning of words and phrases in their original languages or the mystical message contained therein, and are barely even familiar with the rules of Hindustani classical music. Many participate as entitled ticket holders in an auditorium, looking for quick emotional intensity to escape the drone of daily life, rather than as humble seekers at a Sufi shrine, sometimes immersing themselves into a voyage that might last hours, in submission, to be led by the Qawwal where ever he might lead.

Conclusion

An investigation of the true meaning and purpose of Art reveals that the faculty was not traditionally conceived of as a means for the artist to express his emotions, opinions, or his personal experience – for these are all part of the transient circumstantial world, and would therefore be insufficient for a Seeker of Truth or Timeless Beauty. On the contrary, the true Artist aspired to shed away each of these subjective veils, as far as possible, in order to perceive and capture Beauty with as little distortion as possible. Hence the importance to maintain the focus on the artist's pursuit, rather than the chosen medium.

Qawwali blends together timeless universal teachings captured by Sufi poets, with the form of classical Hindustani music. It's primary goal: *Ishq*, a transcendental love, a force of unity. While the style of the musical medium is beautiful and requires virtuosity, acquired

Qawwali blends together timeless universal teachings captured by Sufi poets, with the form of classical Hindustani music. It's primary goal: Ishq, a transcendental love, a force of unity.

over decades of training, by itself it is just a form, one amongst countless human faculties. Absent its primarily spiritual function, this Art becomes little more than entertainment, a momentary stimulation of the senses and emotions, often as an escape from engaging with Life, its challenges, and its opportunities. But to the sincere Seeker, conscious of the substance contained in the form, and courageous enough to reflect and make the necessary effort in search of the meaning of Life, Qawwali may serve as an inner path of meditation, in order to take a step closer, to return to his eternal home.



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A person stands on the edge of a dark, rocky cliff, looking out over a vast, hazy landscape under a golden sunset sky. The scene is silhouetted against the bright light of the setting sun, creating a dramatic and contemplative atmosphere.

THE MEASURE OF SUCCESS

By Yaron Barzilay

National Director

New Acropolis Cultural Organisation (India)

It is natural to wish to live a successful and meaningful life; to feel we managed to contribute, and make some difference, some impact on the world around us; to feel we fulfilled our life. To do so, it can be logical that one would seek to influence others, to be considered successful in their eyes, and someone worth learning from. It is certainly a means to impact others, to get positive attention. It could become a problem however, if we tend to mix means with aims, forgetting that one cannot replace the other. To be considered successful on the outer doesn't stand for the quality of the inner and the actual.

If we take the case of social media for example, to appear successful seems most important to present. The more we are considered as such, the more we gain popularity and attention, the greater the networking, and the greater our influence shall be, at least, so it seems. By the nature of such platforms, appearance becomes the main thing. No one wants to be considered a 'failure', whatever it may mean. Such platforms often look like a billboard for marketing the self, creating a big obsession with self-appearance. One may wonder what tremendous energy, intelligence and ability are invested in such a direction; how immensely our world could benefit if all of that was channelled towards a more beneficial pursuit, to serve a real Ideal, for example.

Sure, it would be naive to ignore the things that influence others; to ignore the so-called 'ways of the world' and social

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networks are very much a part of our lives today. We should be aware of how 'society' and the 'world' defines good and evil, success and failure, even if it's only to know where we are. But understanding its ways doesn't mean we have to adopt them ourselves.

If living a meaningful life is essential for our being, it is most important that we deal with the definition of it ourselves and not let the world define it for us.

If living a meaningful life is essential for our being, it is most important that we deal with the definition of it ourselves and not let the world define it for us.

We must ask ourselves what is more important to us- to be successful as defined by society or to follow our path in life successfully, with the meaning that we choose to give it? What is our actual priority in this matter? Are we more afraid to be seen as a failure by others than to judge it for ourselves? And what exactly does failure mean to us? That too must be as per our own parameter, and not that of the others.



It may again sound naive to mention, but it could just be a simple truth to state, that we tend to care quite a lot about how others perceive us, to gain their approval, often much more than forming our independent judgment on our own life. Sometimes it concerns us so profoundly that it drives our choices, our behaviour, our self-esteem, feeling of happiness, and even our self-identity. This way, we lose our most precious authenticity.

We therefore, must take this matter into our hands and ask ourselves what our definition of a successful and meaningful life is. And how shall we measure it, knowing that each person has their own path to take? Each one is unique and special, and we are called, poetically or not, to dream by ourselves and pursue our dreams, even if we fail a hundred times... And maybe that's what life is all about? An art of living, dreaming and fulfilling in the best way we can.

If others are the judges of how successful my life is, then everything is about what they can see, confirm and appreciate. Appearance becomes much more important than the internal reality. If this becomes my driving force, it can only lead to living superficially. But if it is about pursuing and fulfilling my meaning in life, then I must evaluate how well I'm doing according to my criteria and with utmost sincerity. I'll need to constantly dare and be honest with myself and not be moulded and defined by what is conventional, as uncomfortable as it might be sometimes.

And how shall we measure our success? By which parameters? Is it about reaching a particular finish line, a well-defined achievement? Or is it about a process of bettering ourselves, of a genuine search, measuring the quality and authenticity of our life while moving on the path toward an ever-evolving dream and its actualisation?

Being authentic and bringing the best of myself, comparing myself to no one else, isn't about separateness from the whole. On the contrary, and remarkably, as indicated by the ancient philosophies, only a free individual can form a connection with the whole and be in harmony with the unity of Life.





Genuine authenticity is essential for the drop to return to the ocean, from which it never actually separated, it is said. On the other hand, mirroring the many voices heard from the outer keeps one attached to the most superficial, the periphery of appearance, separated in consciousness from the universal life. The first can offer real generosity, becoming a force of 'Life' and 'Light' to share with others; the second always depends on the recognition of the others and eventually tends to act as a beggar whose primary concern is to receive from others.

We must refuse to see our life as a product to be evaluated by others. We must be the one to choose how to respond to the fundamental questions human beings always ask themselves: 'Who are we?' 'What purpose does life – our own life – have?' and more.

There have always been those who dared to search, find and even offer us some answers if we truly knew how to listen. These aren't questions limited to an article or a book we read; they offer us a real philosophy for living. If we ever stop asking ourselves such basic questions, classifying them as irrelevant nowadays, by which measures shall we define our success in life? What shall be our reference point? We must dare to offer our life the meaning we see in it, while constantly pursuing a greater understanding and offering it greater loyalty and fidelity. We are living beings after all, and so it must mean something to be considered deeply, far beyond mere survival, production and reproduction. This may be an excellent way to start setting our life to be truly successful. $\triangle\triangle\triangle$

***Maybe that's what life is
all about? An art of living,
dreaming and fulfilling in
the best way we can.***

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HARMONIZING WITH NATURE: THE ASHANINKA TRIBE

By Axelle Defrasne

Modern-day living seems to center around finding as much comfort in life as possible and aspiring for some growth, usually material. As a result, we are facing the great challenge of seeing our planet's resources declining, and a general concern about our survival on earth. The fact that ecological activism is on the rise is encouraging, but also underlines that something very wrong is happening and needs to be rectified. Though, we recognize the need to be more aligned to nature, our lifestyles are not in accord with this idea. Probably, for many of us, what it means to live in harmony with nature has become a foreign concept.

In the past, many ancient civilizations and tribes around the world were able to embrace

a lifestyle more in harmony with nature and marked with a deep understanding and respect for their environment. The anthropological work of Gerald Weiss, and his research on a particular tribe, the Ashaninkas, also called Campas, who live in the Amazonian region, has cast light on some age-old principles that helped them to live in symbiosis with this difficult environment.

Could the lifestyle of what some might call a 'primitive' culture be applicable to us living our twenty first century 'smart' lifestyles?

In the past, many ancient civilizations and tribes around the world were able to embrace a lifestyle more in harmony with nature and marked with a deep understanding and respect for their environment.

Perhaps by investigating their beliefs and practices, we too could be taking one step forward in recognizing that man is not separate from his environment but is part of a deeply connected web of life.

Connection to Nature

In those times, the Ashaninkas lived in nomadic settlements, moving depending on the resources available. Thus, their lives were intimately intertwined with the earth's natural cycles. They had to follow and depend on the seasons, day and night, even cycles related to the moon. This knowledge was primordial to



their survival: learning to perceive the right time and place to fish, where to find fruits in which season, learning to respect and read nature. In contrast, today we can say that many of us have no idea where our food is coming from.

This knowledge was respected and transmitted through the generations, to the members of the tribe. Their connection with nature was so direct and strong that they revered the actual natural elements without giving it a material base or a different form. They had no idols to worship, no representation of any god or spirits. According to anthropological research, the sun, the moon and the fire were the main elements worshipped by them. They recognized that their lives are highly dependent on these elements and so it is to them that they dedicated their ceremonies. Those who have assisted in these rituals say that they believe that everything is an interconnected whole, so the manifestation of their gratitude to the entire universe is a central principle of their way of life.



*Everything
is connected
and needs
to align.*

I am a soul

The Ashaninkas identify themselves as part of this whole. Their belief system recognizes the existence of the soul as one of the primary premises of their tradition. Everything is a soul, from the plants and animals to the universe. Everything is connected and needs to align.

Therefore, for an Ashaninka it is of utmost priority to take charge of himself and align to the needs of the soul, independently and individually; a pact between me and myself. Therefore, it is my responsibility to behave in adherence to the laws of nature. This is in my interest as a soul, not only because it nourishes me, but also because it contributes to the whole interconnected web of life: everything is one, there is no separation between me and the rest of nature.

It is not easy for us to fully understand what it means to a native Ashaninka to take responsibility, so let's take an example. If someone in the tribe has a bad stomach, knowing that they mostly consume unprocessed natural food, it will be assumed that this person has eaten something, let's say some fruit, which was not suitable for consumption. It would not occur to an Ashaninka to blame nature for not providing the right food. In this case, the Ashaninka who fell sick was not in alignment with nature as it was his responsibility to be able to identify that this fruit was not to be eaten. This very simple example vividly illustrates that all the responsibility for the choice, the action, and its consequences lie entirely with the one who is performing the action.

Philosophically, a parallel could be made between this idea of misalignment and the

idea of karma in the Indian tradition: it suggests that it is our obligation to take charge of ourselves in order to do the right thing, and follow the direction traced by Dharma, which is defined as the supreme law of nature.

Natural order and death of the body

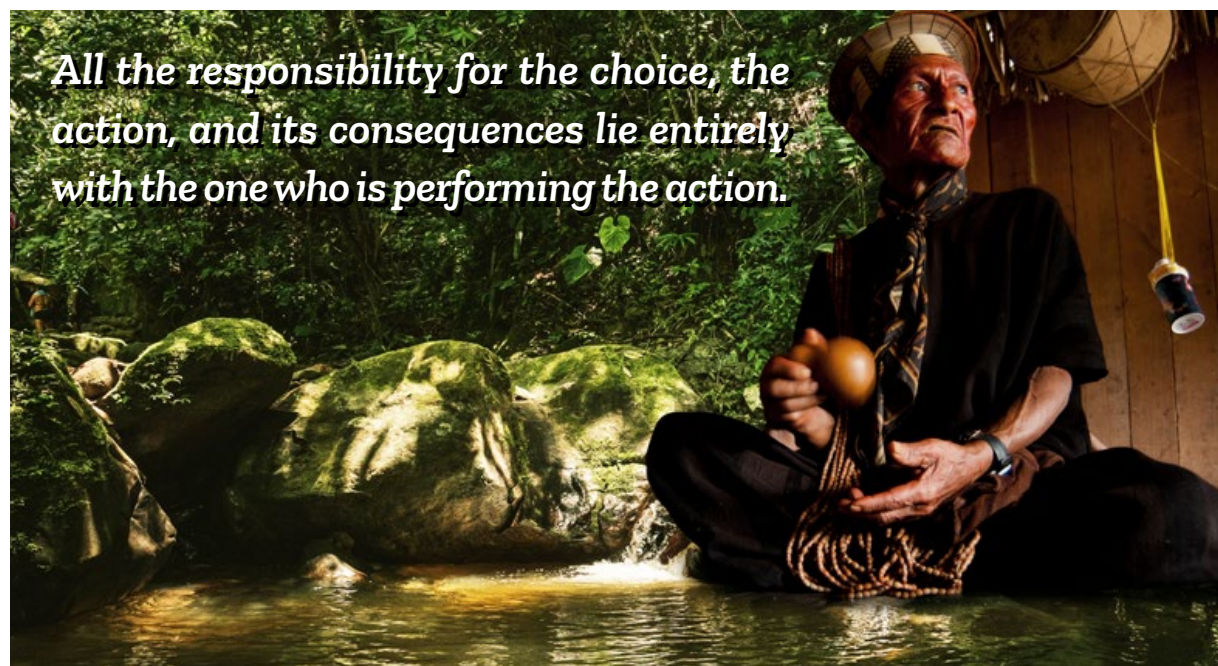
According to the writings of Weiss, the Ashaninkas consider human being as souls, that take on a body for this life, and this shapes their view of death. When they speak about death, they consider a natural death in a very different manner than we do. Only a phenomenon that would affect the soul would actually be a non-natural cause of death, for example, if a bad spirit enters a soul and therefore the body starts degrading because the soul is possessed.

Anything else, an accident with severe injuries or someone being shot, is considered a natural death as there is no threat to the soul, but only degradation or death of the body. It wouldn't matter if the member of the tribe is young or old.

They believe that many Spirits of Nature impact humans on daily basis. These spirits of nature can be represented in tangible forms (the sun, the moon, plants...) but also less tangible, like sickness and diseases. They are the signs of a good alignment or a lack of alignment.

The tradition of the Ashaninka and other tribes of the Amazonian region suggests that shamans have an important role of teaching and helping in correcting these misalignments. They are the critical link between life and its laws. They perform rituals or ceremonies in order to help the members of the tribe to protect their souls, and make the right choices.

Today, though the Ashaninkas are still very connected to nature (between 25000 to 100000 of them still live in the Amazon) the encroaching modern world is taking them more and more away from the roots of their traditions. Its preservation is under threat; their homes, the lands and forests they have lived in for centuries are now being targeted for mining, timber or mass agriculture.



All the responsibility for the choice, the action, and its consequences lie entirely with the one who is performing the action.

Yet, from my investigation and reflections, there seem to be some very practical learnings in the essence of the Ashaninka culture.

They have succeeded in distinguishing between what is essential and eternal from what is temporary and external: The soul must be nourished and protected from deterioration and decay. The body is but a temporary vehicle to house the soul. This principle is a fundamental shift from the contemporary mindset that has become a slave to the avaricious desires of the body at all levels, physical, mental, and emotional.

Furthermore, if we are all souls, can we work towards reducing the separation at all levels: between human beings, with animals and plants, and even with the environment? May be we can see that the long term solution to our ecological problems cannot just be reducing consumption of fuel, or planting more trees, as good as these causes are. We need to go much deeper, into our innermost perceptions and behaviors of who

we are and our role as an integral part of nature.

The Ashaninkas have successfully internalized and act upon the idea of responsibility to both myself, to the collective, and to nature. Can we as a humanity, shift from a culture of competition to cooperation, from asserting our individual rights, to fulfilling our obligations to each other, from viewing Earth's treasures as resources, to assuming stewardship and guardianship of this wonderful planet we call Home?

Perhaps in reviving these time-honored traditional principles practiced by so many cultures across the world, we would be reviving some universal principles of ancient wisdom that could heighten our consciousness and strengthen our recognition of our role in the interconnected and interdependent web of life.



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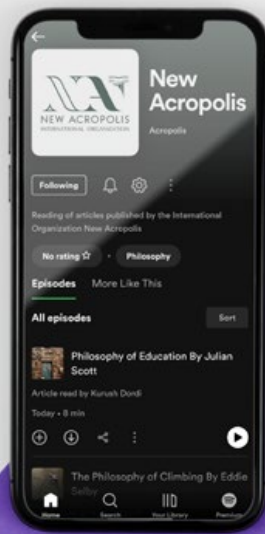


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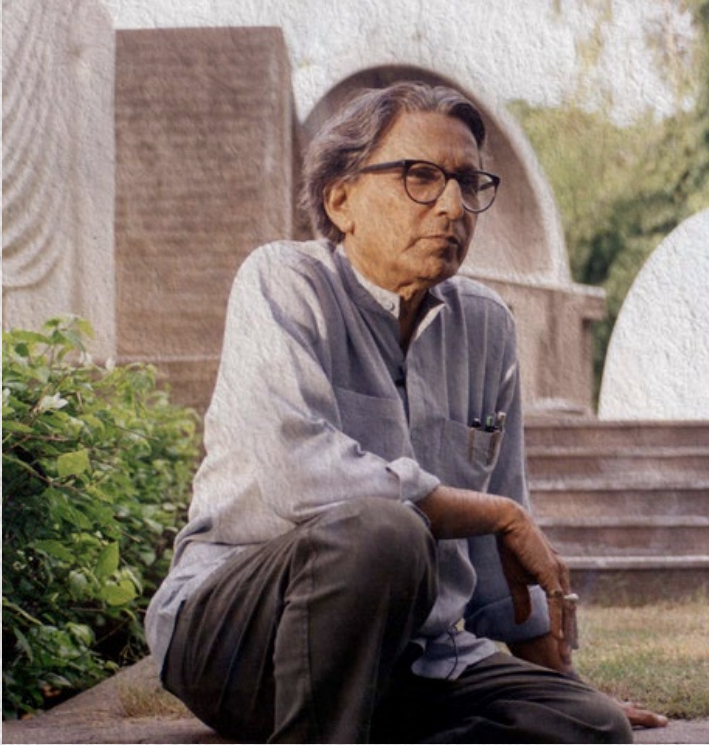
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A Lifetime of Architecture: In Conversation with BV Doshi

Compiled by Zarina Screwvala and Nupur Sampat



“Projects must go beyond the functional to connect with the human spirit through poetic and philosophical underpinnings.”

– The 2018 Pritzker Architecture Prize Jury Citation for Mr. Doshi

On 30th October 2021, New Acropolis Culture Circle hosted renowned architect Balkrishna Vithaldas Doshi, sharing his life experiences in a talk titled ‘A Lifetime of Architecture’. Charting out his early years of learning and practice in the field, he spoke passionately about understanding architecture as a living and ever-evolving concept. “It’s about living, and not just living, but living together, about how communities and societies can grow and become one.”, he explained. Mr. Doshi was born in Pune, he studied at JJ School of Architecture Mumbai, and moved to London and Paris to study under the famous architect Le Corbusier. Later in Ahmedabad, he worked with Louis Kahn. He has founded and taught at various institutions of planning and architecture like the School of Architecture & CEPT in Ahmedabad. Some of his renowned works are IIM Bangalore, CEPT University, Aranya housing project in Indore, ‘Amdavad ni Gufa’ which houses the late artist MF Husain’s paintings, along with Mr. Doshi’s own workplace ‘Sangath’, which is also a public space.

He was awarded the Padma Bhushan and has won several awards in the field of architecture including the Pritzker Prize, and most recently, the 2022 Royal Gold Medal by The Royal Institute of British Architects.

Mr. Doshi shared some of his life lessons including the need to challenge oneself, the importance of continuous learning and looking at life as a celebration. **This article shares some of the key ideas he spoke about.**



Indian Institute of Management Campus, Bangalore, India.

On being open to learn

I started the school of architecture without being qualified, without having a degree in architecture. Later it became a centre for environmental planning and technology, and then a university. If one understands that all this diversity is another kind of opportunity to learn, to grow, to experiment and go beyond, then one is always open, despite not being qualified.

When my mentor Corbusier would sit next to me and start talking... it could be about anything, but he had the idea of transforming it. In one instance, he would absorb it, and in another he would invent it. I learnt absorption, invention, adoption, addition. Every day, every moment I only look out for one thing: Can I do something new today?

Can we align to a Life that is constantly growing, changing and modifying?

One thing that I picked up early in life was the idea of constant growth, change, modification

and surprises. This is how I was brought up. My grandfather had a workshop and it got burnt and he made another workshop, and he added an extension and eventually the family home grew from one floor to several floors. As uncles and cousins came and stayed, the home kept changing, I observed diversity, unity, acceptance and finally celebrations. I learnt that crises will come and go, but the ability to celebrate all of it continued. And you may like or dislike/resist it, but life would continue to unfold. When I do professional work, the client may like it or may not. It may be that somebody else comes and changes it further. The questions that emerge within me are: Is this the end of the situation? Or is it a beginning of something new?"

Identity: am I a drop of water or am I the ocean?

During my childhood, I visited many temples in India, I wondered at the fluidity, joy and connectedness that one could get in a temple, even after so many centuries. I

realised that these temples gave everyone a chance to be connected to them, their basic forms were simple and done with care. On one column you see the face of a horse and on the other column, is another animal; and then I look at it and realise that it has been formed through so many people, thoughts and virtues.

Philosophy offers me the clue that there are no limits, there is no straight line, life is like the river, like flowing water. I often wonder, where does the water drop go? That water eventually adds on, modifies, changes, absorbs other currents, tributaries... It doesn't leave the earth, but it expands, it flows, it comes together and eventually it becomes the ocean. I always wonder, is the drop still saying, "I am the drop" or does it say "I'm with the ocean, I am part of the whole?" I ask myself - is it not really the essence of life to become the whole? And whatever we are, we will evolve, we will modify, and we will become true to ourselves, we will become One.

I design in a manner that allows the buildings to 'live and grow', not freeze. It is not architecture; it is about living. And not only living, but living together.





Aranya Low Cost Housing, Indore, India.

We have a small water body in the office with lotuses. In the mornings the lotuses are always absolutely fresh and open, and they close by sunset, and again the next morning, they open. I wonder how the lotus manages this? How does it work so harmoniously with the sun and reopen fresh every morning? If one can really and totally surrender, then will nature come to help you, to guide you?

The Aranya housing project - taking architecture as a 'living project'.

Mr Doshi speaks of architecture as a catalyst for change. He took an oath early in life, to provide the poorest with a proper dwelling. One of his special projects is the award-winning Aranya low-cost housing project in Indore. He created a plinth, electrical connection, and toilet, allowing the families to build their own homes. The idea was to empower families to build their own houses and make additions

One must know and accept that change and growth is always going to happen, hence architecture to me, is about something that welcomes growth; we add things, we celebrate.

according to their abilities. Today, it supports a vibrant community of over 80,000 individuals. This project won him the prestigious Aga Khan Award for Architecture.

While trying to create this, I didn't want to get too influenced by the disparities that exist and how we as a society segregate people into high class, middle class, low class etc.; rather I thought that "people live there". All the disparities and discrepancies come because we have never taken our practice of architecture as a living practice. Living practice is about humanity. In my childhood, a slum opposite my father's home, made me always wonder about their lives. Once, I overheard a conversation between my family and a lady from the slum; she was crying because her husband had beaten her. I went to see her home and it was a small shack, with no furniture, there was nothing. I was in the 4th standard, and it was then that I decided that I would strive to provide every poor individual with a facility, with a dwelling space to sit, to sleep, to work in.

I design in a manner that allows the buildings to 'live and grow', not freeze. It is not architecture; it is about living. And not only living, but living together. Today, Aranya has become a fantastic place to see how communities can grow, build, and rejoice... and eventually they all become one, not stay separate.

The role of architecture as a celebration of life.

Is an architect not connected to society and a way of life? Is he or she not connected to giving people gardens, open spaces, less traffic, avenues, parks, schools? None of

this is happening today. Because we are 'separate', we have become so narrowly specialized, akin to horses with flaps around their eyes, with a narrow spectrum of seeing.

My architecture is all about the life of people, the climate, the temperatures, the constant conditions. I am often surprised with what emerges. One must know and accept that change and growth is always going to happen, hence architecture to me, is about something that welcomes growth; we add things, we celebrate. Rejoicing, celebrating and allowing growth naturally are key aspects of architecture for me.

I prefer to use the word 'habitat'. A habitat is a place where you live, you inhabit and you celebrate life. A space which is fluid and so beautiful, you should be able to do what you want to do there. You can lie down, sit down, loiter; it should not be designed to do only one kind of function, it should be fluid.

**Every day,
every
moment I
only look out
for one thing:
Can I do
something
new today?**

With today's nuclear families, restricted resources and urban spaces, we are gradually learning to narrow down further and further because of restriction and limitations, most of which are imposed on us and are not out of our choice. Hence, we have ended up missing the old plan of a house or a township where everything fundamental for a mixed land use is at close quarters for public, for society to gather, and use a temple, a school, a shop which is easily accessible without expending too much energy. You are able to fully utilise your energies, with many choices at hand

thereby having more time. With time at your disposal, you experience rejoicing. As human beings we are interested in celebrating life.

Mr Doshi's philosophical perspective has helped us understand how one can use whatever profession they are in, to contribute to a better world. He inspires us to build the conviction of unity as our identity and to live the principle of fraternity. He teaches us to learn to accept and align with the ever-transitioning nature of life, and use all challenges to grow, evolve and to celebrate life. XXX

Amdavad ni Gufa, Ahmedabad, India





New Acropolis Culture Circle is now open to public!

"I firmly believe culture ennobles us. We understand culture as the cultivation of all that is best in every human being."

- International President, New Acropolis,
Carlos Adelantado.

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Interview with the **International President** of New Acropolis

INTRODUCTION

New Acropolis is an international organisation that promotes an ideal of timeless values. Its aim is to contribute to the development of individuals and societies through its work in the fields of philosophy, culture and volunteering. New Acropolis is present in over 50 countries across the five continents and has more than 400 centres worldwide.

Its action in the world is based on three founding ideals:

The ideal of universal fraternity, promoting respect for human dignity, beyond any differences of gender, culture, religion or social background.

The ideal of knowledge, encouraging the love of wisdom through the comparative study of philosophies, religions, sciences and arts.

The ideal of development, enabling each human being to realize their best qualities and values, as a solid basis for a better world.

The president of New Acropolis, Carlos Adelantado, explains how these shared ideals can be achieved.



More than 400 Centres in over 50 Countries

What are the main challenges facing New Acropolis at the moment? What goals would you like to achieve?

a) On a philosophical level, our main goal is to restore the timeless importance of the concept of philosophy.

Today, philosophy is an undervalued word. It lies forgotten at the bottom of a drawer along with other things that are regarded as rather uncomfortable. However, it is natural to ask ourselves questions about why certain things have happened to us or are going to happen to us. From this point of view, philosophy is a much needed tool. It provides a coherent meaning to existence, and helps us to become aware of the important role that each human being can play in the creation of their own life.

- I would also like fraternity to become more present and evident in everyday life.

It's about learning how to give more value to what unites us than to what apparently separates us. To look beyond the superficial

and ever-changing reflections of individuals and events.

The great philosophers have always taught that the more we develop our inner perception of what is essential, the more we will experience an outer fraternity.

b) We want culture to be more present in society.

I'm not just referring to an increase in the number of cultural activities, but to the great ability that culture has to unite nations and to enable people to understand different mentalities. Because an important function of culture is to lift up our consciousness and open our hearts.

I am convinced that, unfortunately, some of the attitudes of intolerance and aggression towards certain individuals or particular segments of the population are due to a lack of culture caused by not knowing about other forms of expression of human activity.

c) With volunteering, our aspiration is that



Volunteering at the "Animal Aware" shelter (Antigua Guatemala, Guatemala).
Acropolis News

each volunteer should develop qualities within themselves, at the same time as they are giving unselfishly for the common good.

Every effort, every act of service for the good of others, can help us understand the meaning of life in a more conscious way; and at the same time, we experience the growth of our inner strengths: solidarity, self-esteem, hope for a better future, empathy... and many others. But, the major effect is an increasing sense of freedom and willpower.

So my great hope is that volunteering actions should not only be good and useful, but that the individuals who act as volunteers can connect more deeply with life.

What is the experience of the more than 400 centres of New Acropolis around the world in these difficult times?

On a personal level, I'm very happy with the way New Acropolis is developing, because it shows that the application of philosophy helps people face their fears and uncertainties.

We are finding that the people who are now coming to our centres are showing greater interest and a genuine desire to understand life and the human being. It is as if the mirrors

which had reflected reality until now had been shattered into a thousand pieces; and suddenly, either we see nothing, or we perceive a different reality. In either case, this becomes the driving force that urges us to walk towards self-knowledge.

We have seen how useful the new technologies can be, as they have allowed us to continue with our work despite the difficulties. But it has also become clear that nothing can replace the quality of human contact. This is why, in the ancient world, the practice of philosophy always took place in schools, in groups, where the use of dialogue as a teaching tool was fundamental and the challenge of learning to live together in harmony was accepted by everyone.

There are people who mistrust organizations

That is true and often with good reason.

However, I believe that an organization can be very useful, because it brings people together and coordinates their different efforts and wills. But of course we should never forget the dangers that can arise from certain deviations in organizations.

For me, a deviation is to impose a particular and personal opinion, without any possibility of dialogue or comparison; to depart from the aims and principles for which the organization was founded; and to take advantage of its structure and operation to achieve renown and social prestige.

Something that I think is very positive is the large number of people who have been

part of New Acropolis over the years. Every year, thousands of people benefit from our philosophy courses, cultural activities or volunteering actions. Some of them join our organization, others prefer to help out from time to time, and others don't want to join at all. But all these people have seen for themselves our efforts to work towards a better society.

There are also people who disagree with you. How would you answer those who criticize New Acropolis?

That they have every right to do so, they are within their rights.

In view of the marvellous diversity and complexity of human nature, one cannot expect to be liked and accepted by everyone. It would be totally unreasonable.

I also believe that criticism can be very constructive if it can be separated from the ill-will and negative feelings that often go with it.

We shouldn't overdramatize this issue, because it is natural for rational beings to analyze, discuss, compare arguments, subject them to examination and, finally, to choose. If that right to criticism were to be eliminated, we would be limiting human freedom and eliminating an important part of philosophy, because critical thinking, in the sense of subjecting life itself with all its conditioning factors to analysis and consideration, is totally natural for philosophers.

And how can you explain that there have been detractors, especially in the past?

We do indeed have to go back to the past to find these types of misunderstandings. In



Lake cleaning on Earth Day (Győr, Hungary). *Acropolis News*

fact, because of my age, I have not had direct experience of some of these situations myself.

But, as I see it, it has always been a problem of a lack of understanding. Perhaps it is due to the complexity of this School of Philosophy in the Classical Tradition, which tries to combine theory and practice in its activities, as a philosophical ideal that aspires to improve the world and human beings, and which from the beginning saw itself as a movement that had the potential to expand internationally.

Even many members of New Acropolis in those early days, whom we have to thank for their efforts and their dedication, did not have a very good understanding of the profound characteristics of New Acropolis. They didn't understand that it was something that came from the remotest past and was therefore something totally new and unrelated to anything known until then in the 20th century. Mistakes were made which have been gradually corrected. And this attitude of self-correction is valid now and at any time in the future, because the spirit of self-criticism can never be absent from the philosophical life.

To this we must add that, when anything new appears, it needs time to adapt to its environment, as well as time to reveal its true potential and the social benefits it can offer as it develops.

Unfortunately, it is inevitable that there will always be people in society who “make a living” out of criticizing and denigrating others in a sensationalist way.

Anyway, the reactions to our philosophical proposal are nothing new for a school of philosophy with deep roots which we could describe as “esoteric”. It is a constant which has been repeated throughout the centuries.

How important is the esoteric aspect for New Acropolis?

The term “esoteric” means “going more within”. So it applies to everything which is hidden, which is inner, while the “exoteric” refers to what is external.

In New Acropolis we understand by “esoteric” the inner aspect, the being of things, that which is hidden from our sight but is essential.

All things and all living beings have an external, visible part, and an inner part which is their foundation. For example, a building has walls, doors and windows which are visible. This would be the exoteric aspect. But it also has a structure consisting of columns, beams and floors which form its skeleton, what supports it, the “esoteric” part which is not visible from the outside.

In the universe we see planets, stars and galaxies. They are bodies made of matter, in some cases gaseous matter, so they are the exoteric aspects. The reason for their existence, the life that animates those bodies, their purpose, would be the esoteric aspect.

As individuals we perform actions every day that

have an outward practical purpose, but behind our external attitudes are the true driving forces of our actions. These driving forces, which are of a metaphysical nature (in the sense that they go beyond the physical level), make up the esoteric part of human beings.

That is why, in New Acropolis, we speak of a philosophy of causes, which can also be called natural or esoteric philosophy, because we are interested in understanding the reasons behind things, their hidden causes, which we can perceive by using our reason or our intuition. To do this, we need to develop a greater degree of sensitivity and a greater capacity to connect and fit together the elements around us.



Lecture series on Japan with laido demos (Montevideo, Uruguay).
Acropolis News

Why is the same value given to Eastern and Western philosophy in New Acropolis?

Why not? We cannot deny the philosophical legacy of what we call the East, of cultures like India, Japan, Tibet, China, and others, as well as the contribution of Western philosophy. The problem is that there is still a lot of latent racism, and not only in the physical context. Intellectual vanity and racism are much worse than physical racism, and even worse is the spiritual arrogance and racism of believing oneself to be in sole possession of the truth.

What is the role of the so-called Living Forces in New Acropolis?

These are groups made up of members who choose to dedicate time and effort to directly support the vital functioning of our centres. They also offer levels of inner and outer experience, where people can put knowledge into practice and do exercises that help them to progress along the path of philosophy as a way of life, as the classics of both East and West recommend.

The Living Forces are about bringing to life the forces we have within us, as well as getting to know and learning to utilize the forces of life. These are important matters, so it is natural that there should be certain conditions of entry for members of these groups, such as honesty and common sense (to mention just two). Not everyone is admitted, and this can give rise to a sense of frustration and certain hostile attitudes in those who are not accepted. But this is a risk that cannot be avoided.

Returning to our world, what do you think is the most fundamental error of our times?

From my point of view, the greatest error continues to be the confusion between means and ends.

A clear example is economics. Economics should be seen as a useful and necessary

means for the creation and preservation of structures, but never as an end in itself.

It should help to improve educational opportunities and ensure that education becomes accessible to an increasing number of people in the world. It should help to alleviate the burden of heavy, mechanical and repetitive work. It should help to provide human beings with opportunities for development in all areas of life.

The desire to possess, to accumulate wealth, results in harming others, in encouraging excessive competition and the exploitation of other people in order to obtain bigger profits. It is disastrous from the human perspective and from the perspective of planning for a better future.

In New Acropolis, for example, we finance ourselves mainly by the monthly subscriptions paid by all our members, by the sale of our books and by small internal workshops which help us to achieve self-sufficiency. They are small sums which allow us to keep our premises open and take on different cultural and volunteering projects.

Despite the fact that economics currently rules everything and is steering the course that humanity is following, we do not think that it represents the only force of progress for nations and individuals.

What is your opinion about materialism?

For a long time this has been the dominant idea that has moved the world. And it is the idea which has ended up imposing itself in the fields of politics, science, economics, education and also, unfortunately, morality. It has penetrated the hearts of our homes and the brains of people. The materialistic mentality rules the life of the vast majority of the inhabitants of the planet.

Is that good or bad? Probably it is an experience that humanity as a whole needs to go through. Perhaps it is necessary to follow the path of materialism to its end so that other aspects of human existence can be revalued.

Right now, it is not unreasonable to recognize that materialistic scientists have encountered their great stumbling block: to explain how consciousness has been able to emerge from the random evolution of matter. We know a lot about the behaviour of matter, but we do not know the REASON WHY.

The systems of education, politics and economics that are based on materialism have also failed. People, in general, are no happier in spite of having more material possessions and more comforts (in some areas of the planet much more than in others). It has to be recognized that it has not been possible to eradicate hunger, poverty and the tremendous inequality that reigns on our planet.

Can politics and philosophy be combined?

Philosophy can be combined with any facet of the human being: with art in its intuition of the beautiful, with science in its desire to



Volunteering in Kindergarten (Tel Aviv, Israel), *Acropolis News*

come closer to what is true, with religion in its expression of the good, and with politics in the need for justice.

In order for human beings to live together harmoniously in society, the rights and duties of citizens have to be clearly established, and this is where the concept of justice comes in. Ever since ancient times, both Confucius and Plato (amongst others) were concerned with this search for justice, and Plato's dialogue "The Republic" is perhaps the most significant text in this regard.

This is demonstrated by the many criticisms it receives, as well as the great praise and innumerable references we can find in works of later writers, from contemporaries of Plato down to our own times.

Personally, I don't believe that the intention of the Athenian philosopher was to achieve the creation of an ideal society formed by perfect human beings, but to offer some reflections and possible solutions to the many problems of the different regimes of the Greek cities of his times. In fact, in a later dialogue, "The Laws", he modifies some of the arguments from The Republic.

In some intellectual circles, Plato is considered to be totalitarian.

I think it is also fair to say that, for the vast

majority of researchers and unprejudiced intellectuals, Plato is considered a very wise philosopher, a sage. In ancient Greece, the concept of the sage was very broad: it implied being a philosopher, a mathematician, a scientist, a doctor of the soul, a poet, a political adviser... A concept of "totalitas", or wholeness. This is what Plato has in mind when he proposes a training for citizenship based on a holistic education that would incorporate the different aspects of human nature.

Those who criticize Plato forget to mention the duties which the great philosopher stipulated for the governing class.

Plato's advice continues to be valid today, such as his stipulations that the RULERS:

- Must have demonstrated their love for the common good by selfless voluntary service, and their love for virtue by an exemplary private life.
- Should not own property, but only have the use of it. In other words, they would not be able to use their position to enrich themselves.
- Should not manipulate the people through populist rhetoric.
- Before being appointed, they would be tested to ensure that they have sufficient moral and intellectual capacity.
- The exercise of power is to be understood as a sacrifice.

And there are other requirements as well...

What do we demand of our politicians? What

criteria do the parties follow to select their candidates? It's a good question.



Humanitarian aid for small businesses affected by the oil spill (Lima, Peru)
Acropolis News

Can democracy be improved?

Without any doubt, just as everything that exists on the face of the Earth can be improved. In my opinion, we should make a real effort to achieve more for the common good, beyond the partisan interests of one sector or another.

The sometimes almost irrational confrontations between different factions give rise to many policy changes, which slow down the progress of the whole. The desire of politicians to discredit their adversaries, the lack of ethics when fulfilling electoral promises, the misappropriation of funds and the dubious financing of many of the parties, along with the unqualified nature of some candidates is something that leaves a lot of room for improvement.

We also need to focus on the improvement of education, because it is the system that stands most in need of it, since citizens can elect their representatives periodically at the polls. In order to be able to think and to decide, we all need to receive a continuous education. And, above all, education is needed in order to lead others.



Women in Philosophy (Poland), Acropolis News

The founder of New Acropolis, Jorge Ángel Livraga, taught that systems are good if the human beings who form part of them are good. And they cease to be good when the human beings who make them up become corrupt and inefficient.

What is the approach of New Acropolis towards religion?

It is the same approach as that which was taken by schools of philosophy in all ages, that is, of absolute respect for the different religious forms, but those forms cannot be imposed or be dogmatic.

For most people, belonging to a religion is the result of the geographical place in which they were born, and their family environment. But as individuals develop their own capacity for introspection and reflection, sooner or later they will begin to think about their views on what we can call The Sacred.

Those views should be absolutely personal and free, because they involve the mind, the heart and the consciousness as a whole. And I believe that even those who call themselves atheists have some kind of relationship with the Sacred within themselves.

Some will find the established religious forms useful, others will adopt their own forms; for some it will be a connection based on objective elements, and for others it will be

a highly subjective encounter. It is a good exercise of being tolerant of all views.

The point is that no one can own the spirituality of others.

Why is the symbolic aspect of life so important?

Perhaps it is part of the connection with that intelligible and higher world which Plato referred to. We have to bear in mind that logic and its mechanisms have their limitations, which are natural for a linear world. But in a non-linear reality, the characteristics of time and space change and, consequently, the consciousness is affected in a different way: there is an increase and expansion of the consciousness which results in a deeper and more subtle understanding of reality.

I'm not talking about the subconscious or the unconscious, but (if you will allow me the expression) about the supraconscious. A higher dimension of consciousness, where knowledge can be perceived without the intervention of the senses and where the experiences we have on that plane are under the complete control of the individual. Symbols help us to use analogies that connect them with higher ideas.

Why do you think people use symbols? They are present in the business world, in society, in the transcendent dimension and even in everyday life.

To start with, I can say that there seems to be a need to belong to something, and that leads to the use of anagrams, symbols and emblems as a means of recognition. They



Ikebana workshop (Prague, Czech Republic), *Acropolis News*

are used by employees of large and small companies, clothing and footwear brands, sports and cultural associations, financial corporations, etc. The use of symbols is something that has been and continues to be present at all times and in all places.

Perhaps we all know, in a natural and innate way, that we need to achieve ever higher, intuitive states of consciousness, which will enable us to go beyond the limits of the conceptual plane.

Another reason may be that the symbolic world constitutes the great evolutionary difference that distinguishes human beings from other kingdoms: the symbolic imaginarium is present when we get married, or when we graduate. When someone is born and comes into the world, we give them a name, and we say goodbye to them at the end of their life, all in a symbolic way. People wear rings, necklaces, clothes and colours... Even tattoos, which are so much in fashion at the moment, are an approach to the world of symbols. And something as human as laughter and tears cannot be understood without acknowledging their symbolic background.

We can also see that there are symbols that have an identical meaning in all civilisations throughout history: the open or closed hand, the wheel as a symbol of construction or

of the cyclic nature of life, fire in relation to wisdom, the eagle as a messenger, the sun as the king of heaven...

One thing that has struck me in this respect is how much interest there has been recently in series and films featuring this kind of symbolic language.

In New Acropolis as well, we use symbols related to the activity we are doing: sports, volunteering, artistic workshops, martial arts, and philosophy itself. In our school of philosophy we spend a lot of time studying symbols of the sacred in the different civilisations.

And in our philosophical celebrations of the seasons of the year, we also use symbols related to spring, summer, autumn and winter.

What advice would you give to someone who feels that their life has no meaning?

The first piece of advice would be to learn to ask themselves questions. If someone is able to ask themselves questions but they don't find any answers, perhaps they are not searching in the most effective way, or in the right place.

I would advise them to look within themselves and not outside, because there are answers which cannot come from the external world. They should try to perceive the values they have within themselves and, as they gradually develop those values, they will naturally find some points of connection with life.

Because this leads to another question, which is equally important: if life has meaning (and let us assume it does), how can that meaning

be perceived? With what kinds of senses? It is obvious that we need to develop some latent powers: for example, the ability to perceive the meaning of life.

And where is true strength to be found?

For me, there is no doubt that it is to be found in the development of consciousness (as an end), and in education (as a means for achieving it).

Jorge Ángel Livraga always maintained that education is the use of culture to accelerate human evolution, to bring about a transmutation of the human being. He insisted that education is not about twisting or forcing people's natures, but about freeing them from the yoke of the instincts and from psychological and spiritual narrowmindedness. Because it is these factors that imprison human beings and are the cause of suffering.

And it is possible to achieve this, because every human being is born with certain latent potentials and qualities, which they can develop if they are educated in the right way.

Jorge Livraga said that the true art of teaching consists in informing without deceiving, instructing without politicizing and educating without deforming. Its aim is to enable human beings to become conscious, happy and useful citizens, who know how to use their

hands, their hearts and their minds.

And perhaps we can also actualize elements that are higher than the rational mind, such as imagination and intuition, which can enable us to encounter that world which is inhabited by the greats ideals, the archetypal ideas, the purest dreams.

It must be difficult to become a teacher in New Acropolis.

It is a question of proving one's abilities, completing certain studies and achieving merit.

Here I need to explain briefly that New Acropolis is an institution of an educational nature, which is officially recognized as an international not-for-profit organisation.

Since it is a private, legally recognized institution, it can create its own models of academic training, although it always follows the same logic as that of the public institutions.

In this way, our academic levels are inspired by the models used in European universities. It is what is known as the Bologna system, which is being applied in many countries.

In this sense, universities in the Bologna system use two types of degrees: those known as 'official degrees' and those known as 'institution-specific degrees'.

Following the model of institution-specific studies, and in view of the fact that our programme of studies is very wide-ranging, we have structured our academic levels into: Expert Diploma, Specialist Diploma, and two levels of Master's Degrees.

Volunteering in Kindergarten (Tel Aviv, Israel), *Acropolis News*





World Earth Day 2022 "To Earth" (L'Aquila, Italy), Acropolis News

Our teachers are qualified at one or other of these levels.

In addition, and no less importantly, they must be clear examples of compliance with the Code of Ethics to which we all subscribe. If there has been a proven infringement of the Code of Ethics, the person concerned cannot belong to the teaching faculty and will be removed from it.

What do you think New Acropolis has achieved to date and what does it still have to achieve?

Of all the successes that have been achieved over the 65 years of life of this philosophical ideal, I would highlight the fact that harmonious coexistence and fraternity have become a reality for thousands of young people across the five continents. New Acropolis is made up of women and men of all races, of different cultures and religious beliefs, or none, and of all social backgrounds. For us, the fact of being human transcends any other sectarian consideration.

Our work is about providing knowledge, with an eclectic and non-dogmatic approach, and has been recognized in several countries as being "in the public interest".

What do we still have to achieve?

We have to find the right way of being

correctly understood. We have to ensure that our voice is able to resonate in many more hearts, so that everyone who is looking for us can find us.

How would you like to end this interview?

I would like to end by talking about philosophy, because we know that in a curved universe beginnings and endings converge. And I reaffirm the need for philosophy and its usefulness.

Philosophy is about establishing a true relationship between the objective knowledge we have of the world, and the subjective nature of our inner being (which is not for that reason less real, but rather is "another reality").

A TRUE RELATIONSHIP is where actions reflect a way of feeling and thinking. And that feeling and thinking must be aligned with the synthesis of our objective and subjective experiences, that is, our experience of life.

This implies that, with the right attitude, the particular philosophy of each human being will improve with time, because our experiences of life can also become increasingly deeper and more subtle.

New Acropolis is a field of inner and outer experimentation, which offers the possibility of individual improvement and collective improvement. New Acropolis is a world full of possibilities. Just like life itself. It is philosophy in action. $\Delta\Delta\Delta$

The original interview was published in Spanish on May 2022; Click [here](#) to watch the video.

PUBLIC EVENTS **NEW ACROPOLIS** MUMBAI

Sat
8 Oct

Interactive
Talk

6 pm (2 hrs)

[Register Here](#)



FAQS OF LIFE:

A PHILOSOPHER'S SEARCH FOR PURPOSE

Is there a purpose to life? How can I discover and fulfil my potential? Many great men and women across civilizations dedicated their lives in search of such timeless questions. What practical lessons can we take from their discoveries, to allow us to live with more clarity and purpose today? After all... the way of Philosophy is not just about asking questions, but about developing tools to live with more Truth and meaning!

Sat
29 Oct

Interactive
Talk

6pm (2 hrs)

[Register Here](#)



THE EVERYDAY VOLUNTEER FOR A BETTER WORLD

"Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself" – Leo Tolstoy

Our world today, can be seen as a sum of our collective actions and choices. Join us as we explore how learning to bring the best versions of ourselves every day, can enable us to contribute to a better world tomorrow. Together, let's awaken the spirit of the Everyday Volunteer!

Sat
5 Nov

Interactive
Talk

6pm (2 hrs)

[Register Here](#)



FINDING STABILITY AMIDST CHANGE

Amidst distractions and uncertainties around us, can we discover a more stable centre within ourselves, that can serve as our anchor and compass despite the changes? Explore how the path of Philosophy can help us build inner stability and strength in our times today.

Events will be held in-person at our Mumbai Centre.

PUBLIC EVENTS NEW ACROPOLIS MUMBAI

**Thur
17 Nov**

Talk &
Presentation

6pm (2 hrs)

[Register Here](#)

Venue:

National
Gallery of
Modern Art
Auditorium,
Mumbai



CELEBRATING
WORLD
PHILOSOPHY
DAY 2022

*"It is only with the
heart that one can
see rightly; that
which is essential is
invisible to the eye"*

- Antoine de Saint-Exupéry



EXPLORING THE MEANING OF LIFE THROUGH SYMBOLS

Symbols exist across cultures as an expression of the timeless human search for meaning, acting as a bridge between the visible and invisible. New Acropolis (India) in collaboration with National Gallery of Modern Art (Ministry of Culture, Government of India) celebrate World Philosophy Day 2022 through a talk and presentation exploring the universal language of symbols through Philosophy and Art. Director of New Acropolis (India) Yaron Barzilay will explore symbols across traditions as a window to discover deeper Truths about life and our role as human beings. Philosopher and Photographer Pierre Poulain will present the art and medium of photography as a means to touch the higher aesthetic and beauty of life.

The event is part of a global celebration of World Philosophy Day by New Acropolis in over 60 countries as a way to reaffirm the power of Philosophy to change the world by enabling us to change ourselves.

**Sat
3 Dec**

Interactive
Talk

6pm (2 hrs)

[Register Here](#)

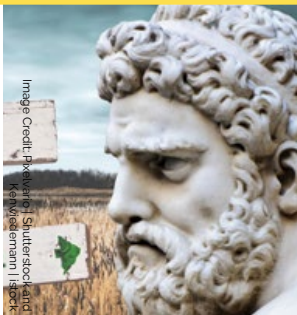


Image Credit: Shutterstock and Kenyalemann | iStock

HERCULES AND THE WAY OF COURAGE

The mighty Hercules is known for his unmatched strength and determination. It is because of the challenges he encountered, the courage with which he faced them, and the wisdom with which he extracted lessons from each, that he become the hero we know today. Together we will decode the Myth of Hercules to learn how we can face our own battles with this spirit of victory.

**Sat
10 Dec**

Interactive
Talk

6pm (2 hrs)

[Register Here](#)



Image Credit: Tanika3 | iStock | Shutterstock

PATTERNS IN NATURE: LEARNING TO SEE DEEPLY

"Look deep into nature, and then you will understand everything better" – Albert Einstein

The infinite patterns we find in nature, can give us a glimpse into deeper principles that govern and touch all of Life! As we learn to see the geometry and harmony that exists in nature around us, perhaps we can learn to see ourselves and our role in the world with more clarity and wonder.

PUBLIC EVENTS NEW ACROPOLIS PUNE

Creating An Impact Series

Can we make this world a better place if we joined our forces? Through art, we could learn to bring more harmony and beauty in our thoughts and daily actions. By living Philosophy we could develop lasting inner values to navigate adventurously through the uncertainties. And through Volunteering we can will our way to improvement - individually and collectively.

Creating an Impact through Culture

**Sun
9 Oct**

Interactive
Talk &
Workshop
6pm (2 hrs)

[Register Here](#)



CENTERING YOURSELF: LESSONS FROM MANDALAS

Do we find ourselves caught up in different roles, often losing our ability to concentrate? In the many pulls of the day to day, could it be that we end up losing our connection to the central meaning and purpose of our lives? Let us take inspiration from Mandalas, as it guides us in the voyage to our own centre, and learn to develop the art of concentration.

**Sun
30 Oct**

Interactive
Talk
6pm (2 hrs)

[Register Here](#)



PRINCIPLES OF LIFE THROUGH SACRED ARCHITECTURE

Is there more to life than what meets our eye? Different traditions speak of eternal principles in life, which, if we are able to align to, can allow us to live with more harmony and meaning. Beyond the external grandeur of sacred architecture like the pyramids of Egypt, the City of Delphi, or ancient Indian temples, these structures also contain universal symbols that can reveal timeless lessons for our lives today.

Creating an Impact through Philosophy

**Sun
6 Nov**

Interactive
Talk
6pm (2 hrs)

[Register Here](#)



ARJUNA'S DILEMMA: DARING TO CHOOSE

"A dream is not that which you see while sleeping; it is something that does not let you sleep." These words of Dr. Abdul Kalam reminds us that to dare to dream is to truly be awake. The dream of a new and better world belongs to us all, but what keeps us from awakening to this dream? Perhaps it requires individuals who "dare". Let us gain some insights from ancient philosophers who gave us keys to staying forever young and adventurous by participating in this collective dream.

Events will be held in-person at our Pune Branch.

PUBLIC EVENTS **NEW ACROPOLIS PUNE**

**Fri
11 Nov**

Presentation
& Panel
Discussion

7pm (2 hrs)

Register Here

Venue:

Raah
– A Literacy &
Cultural Centre
(Pune)



CELEBRATING
WORLD
PHILOSOPHY
DAY 2022

EXPLORING THE MEANING OF LIFE THROUGH SYMBOLS CELEBRATING WORLD PHILOSOPHY DAY

"It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; that which is essential is invisible to the eye" - Antoine de Saint-Exupéry
Symbols exist across cultures as an expression of the timeless human search for meaning, acting as a bridge between the visible and invisible. Director of New Acropolis (India) Yaron Barzilay will explore symbols across traditions as a window to discover deeper Truths about life and our role as human beings. This will be followed by an interactive discussion with young philosophers who practice Philosophy as a way of life. Which symbols inspire them to develop values like stability and courage, in their daily lives? Together we will discover how exploring symbols can help us lead a more adventurous, meaningful and happier life.

The event is part of a global celebration of World Philosophy Day by New Acropolis in over 60 countries as a way to reaffirm the power of Philosophy to change the world by enabling us to change ourselves.

Creating an Impact through Volunteering

**Sat
3 Dec**

Interactive
Talk

6pm (2 hrs)

Register Here



THE EVERYDAY VOLUNTEER FOR A BETTER WORLD

"Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself" – Leo Tolstoy
Our world today, can be seen as a sum of our collective actions and choices. Throughout history, every person who has made a positive impact in the world, has succeeded against great odds by using the power of their Will to offer their service. Join us as we explore how learning to bring the best versions of ourselves every day, can enable us to contribute to a better world tomorrow.

NEWS SPOTLIGHT

► Philosophy ► Culture ► Volunteering

On July 15th International Organization New Acropolis (IONA) celebrated its 65th anniversary in Mumbai and Pune with performances, creative activities and the making and sharing of dinner together, in the true spirit of fraternity.

Here are some other memorable focal points among the various activities organized by New Acropolis India, in Mumbai and Pune, over June July and August.

► Philosophy

Let us awaken our human spirit and dare to build a better future based on Goodness, Truth, Beauty and Justice

LIVE ADVENTUROUSLY, a 3-part series of interactive talks dealt with the idea that to choose to act heroically to overcome limitations and uncover our true potential is essentially to live philosophically, with more freedom and sustained happiness. ARTIST, DREAMER, WARRIOR, the first in the series, explored the many paths one could take while living a philosophical life that has a positive impact, THE WARRIOR – GENTLEMAN'S WAY illustrated the power of prioritizing truth and goodness in the tradition of the Knights in the search for success in what really matters, and THE MODERN SAMURAI the last in the series explored how developing virtues like courage and loyalty could lead to a more centered, stable and meaningful life.

The Pune branch hosted National Director Yaron Barzilay who presented an interactive talk on NAVIGATING CHALLENGES THE STOIC WAY, highlighting the Stoic approach of building inner strength to confront our everyday challenges.



► Culture

The search for Beauty is a path to Wisdom

Mumbai's renown and influential sculptor Arzan Khambatta invited members of New Acropolis Culture Circle into his art studio for a unique treat and an INSIGHT INTO SCULPTING. Khambatta repurposes metal scrap by cutting, welding, filing, bending, twisting and moulding, to reimagine, reform, rejuvenate and regenerate Beauty from the ordinary.

Many of his seminal and distinctive sculptures dot the landscape of Mumbai.

► Philosophy ► Culture ► Volunteering



► Volunteering

The natural expression of the spirit of union with life and humanity

Volunteers of New Acropolis Main Centre organised a workshop and sapling plantation at Jog garden in the Colaba area of Mumbai, in association with Emerald Sustainable Foundation and the BMC. Over 500 saplings were planted over 4 days using the Miyawaki technique.

In response to the shortage of Blood faced by Masina Hospital Mumbai, a Blood Donation Drive was immediately set up at our Mumbai center, demonstrating the ability of volunteers to respond to the need of the hour, and make an invaluable contribution to society.



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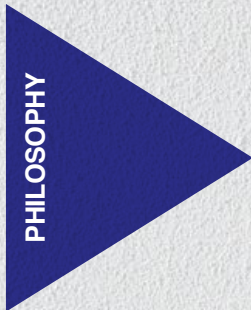
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Philosophy, when it is practical, is educational. It helps us to know ourselves and to improve ourselves. To be a philosopher is a way of life committed to the best aspirations of humanity.



The practice of human values is the basis for a model of active and participative Culture, which brings out the qualities of each person, broadens the horizons of the mind and opens the human being up to all the expressions of the spirit.



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

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