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THE ACROPOLITAN



Many Seeds, One Garden:
Learning from the Sacred
Groves of India

FEATURE

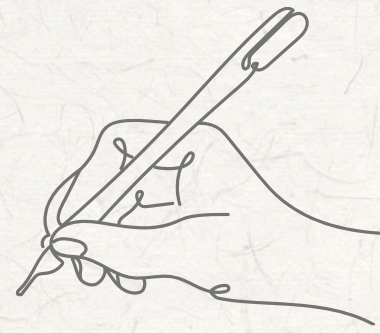
The Egyptian Temple as
a Metaphor for Life

The Ancient Tradition of
Kalaripayattu: In conversation
with Lakshmanan Gurukkal

JUL | AUG | SEP
2024



FROM THE EDITORIAL DESK



Dear Reader,

The external strife and separation we witness in the world today, are perhaps a reflection of a disharmony within ourselves. In our modern era, the mind often takes precedence over the heart, yet it is the heart that can guide us. Sadly, contemporary pursuits often lack and even impede this essential balance.

Philosophy helps us see things as they are, and to come closer to what lies beyond just the visible. It is a quest to find out who we are, to understand the meaning of life.

When we look through this lens, we find that we have been bequeathed with a treasure trove of wisdom: The oral tradition of folklore carries ageless insights preserved in myths. Sacred groves symbolize the deep, symbiotic relationship between humanity and nature, bridging cultures and environments. Ancient Egyptian temples stand as monuments to humanity's enduring quest for spiritual connection and transcendence. Traditional martial arts such as Kalaripayattu embody values of discipline, respect, and inner strength, guiding practitioners towards self-mastery. Artistic expression goes beyond mere representation of human experiences, reflecting our innate pursuit of beauty and truth. It invites us to explore the visible world as a gateway to understanding the invisible realms, guiding us in our search for profound truths and wisdom.

By embracing these diverse perspectives, we can find common ground and recognize the underlying unity that connects all humanity.

What we need is a sincere search. We need to Discover, Awaken, Transform.

Malini Nair
Editor



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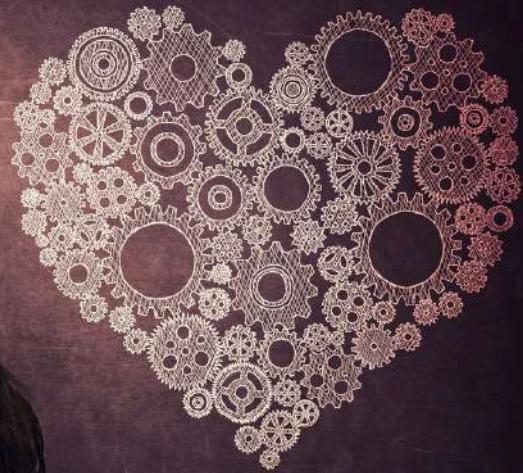
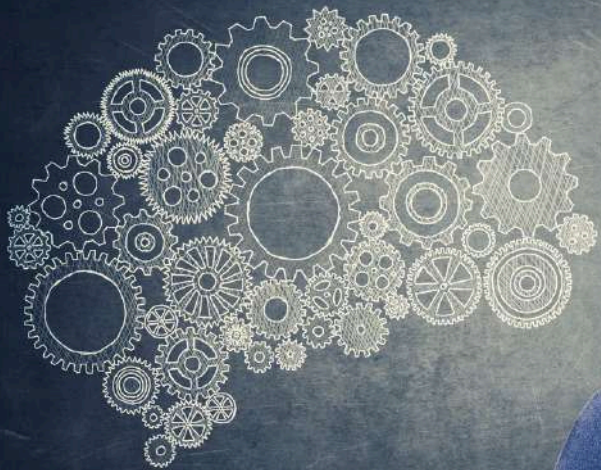
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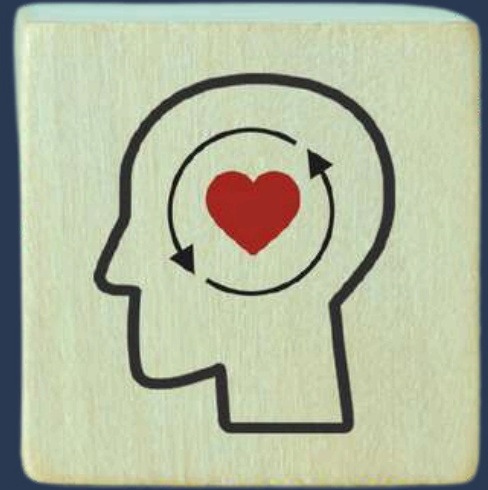
Many Traditions, One Essence: Seeking Beauty through a Diversity of Expressions

Compiled by The Acropolitan Editorial Team

The Dichotomy of the Mind & the Heart

By Archana Samarth





We seem to live in a world of dichotomies, a world where sharply contrasting ideas exist. For example, we can say that with all the modern technological breakthroughs, humanity is advancing and yet, we can also say that there is regression of human values as evident in the strife, separation, poverty, malnourishment and disease of both the mind and body that are prevalent in the world today. This is closely related to, and perhaps is an outcome of another fundamental dichotomy of our times, that of the heart and the mind.

The heart says one thing and the mind another, causing confusion and conflict about which is right. Whom should we listen to? This can be seen among some youth for example, on the brink of making a career choice, *should I pursue what truly interests me, or would it be right to do what is considered to be more prestigious and financially rewarding?*

In the times we live, the mind, considered to be the most developed aspect of us, is given preference, and we do strongly identify with the mind. We tend to follow the philosophical dictum, "**I think therefore I am,**" attributed to the 17th century French philosopher, Rene Descartes. This suggests that our thoughts, opinions, preferences and also our prejudices make us who we are. The heart, on the other hand is considered emotional, irrational, fickle, unreliable and weaker of the two. This identification of the intellectual self is reinforced in our society right from childhood. But the question persists, is this all there is to us, OR, is there more to our identity?

Let us explore the true nature of both the heart and mind, to see if in understanding them better, we can learn to optimise the use of these tools so that they serve us as they were meant to do.

The Nature of the Mind

Thoughts, opinions, beliefs, analysis, reasoning, reflection, are all the activities of the mind. And, thinking is perhaps the mind's most used tool. We are thinking all the time: with consciousness and sometimes with less or no consciousness. BUT, do we really know *How to think*? Choices that we later regret, paralysing doubts, and opinions not founded on facts suggest that we don't necessarily use this faculty in the best way possible.

The ability to think and choose is a unique mental opportunity that only we humans have! We can plan, organise and use logic to analyse information. This allows us to take charge of ourselves and give direction to our lives. There are however common barriers to correct thinking, traps that most of us have fallen into at some point or the other:

A common trap is of fanciful thinking i.e. when we do not take into consideration pertinent factors. An everyday example of this would be, when we reach late for an appointment, it is perhaps because we have not accounted for the traffic, an external reality, and underestimated the time taken to reach the destination. Jumping to conclusions and judging without gathering facts, is a human tendency which can lead to impulsive reactions that we later regret. Our thinking can sometimes be self-centred, i.e. we view situations only from our own perspective without taking into consideration another point of view and thus limiting ourselves. A contrasting tendency is to be easily influenced by others as in the case of peer or societal influence, or herd mentality ("Others are doing it so it must be right"). This could lead us to taking wrong decisions even while sensing that we are being unauthentic.

Sometimes, accumulated anger and resentment lead to the tendency to get trapped in the same thoughts again and again, in a circular and unconstructive way. These mental habits are quite common and suggest that we don't always use our mind in the most effective manner.

The mind is a marvellous tool, a gift for mankind that sets us apart from animals, but we need to develop it in a conscious, knowing manner. We need to learn to use our mind by bringing order to our cluttered thoughts, to clarify our ideas by questioning, investigating and allowing reason to guide them. To work with our mind in a conscious rather than a habitual manner.



One can bring more consciousness to the way our mind works by

- learning to work with order, priorities and time i.e. mental discipline.
- having a real dialogue, a true exchange of thoughts and ideas by being willing to listen and understand what others are saying to us.
- reducing the focus on unpleasant bad memories and negative thoughts so as to allow space for new ideas and recognise the opportunities of the present.
- leading our mind rather than allowing it be scattered. As Lord Krishna says in the Bhagvad Gita, "wherever and whenever the mind wanders, due to its flickering and unsteady nature, we must bring it back under the control of the Self" and, that the mind can be controlled by constant "practice and detachment."

How do we practice detachment? By developing a more wholistic view of life. A philosophical perspective that helps us to know our true nature and who we can be. To recognise how our mind works, to look at it in an objective and detached manner rather than be completely ruled by it.

The Nature of Heart:

We can say there's more to the heart than we may know, or think.

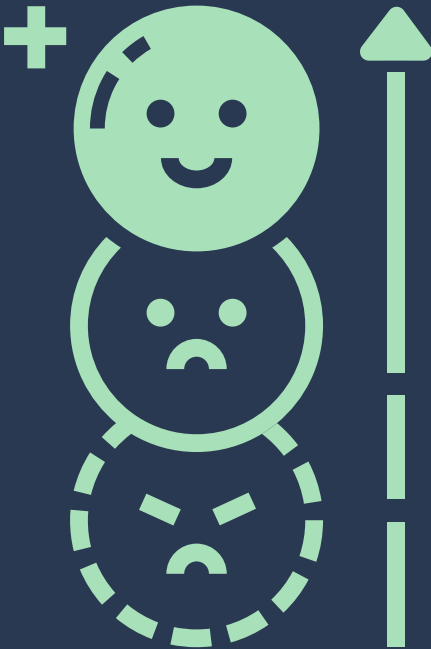
From a scientific and physiological point of view, the heart is in the centre of the body and from there it transmits the vitality of blood in all directions. From a metaphysical point of view, the heart is compared to the sun in the Solar System. From a philosophical point of view, the heart is considered to be the seat of moral consciousness, and of intelligence, intuition and spirituality.

Modern Medicine is beginning to recognise the concept of the "Heart brain". In 1991 Dr Armour discovered that that the heart has its own "little brain" that can learn, remember, and even feel and sense. (1) This suggests that science is only NOW gradually catching up with what ancient wisdom already knew!

"The heart is the abode of the Spiritual Man, whereas the Psycho-Intellectual Man dwells in the head..."

- Helena Blavatsky





“there are feelings which wrinkle the face and the soul and there are feelings that endow them with the brilliance of youth.”

Numerous ancient sacred texts call upon disciples to preserve the purity of their hearts. This not only refers to the purity of feelings, but also implies the wide range of actions which Siddhartha Gautama once proposed through the Noble Eightfold Path: Right words, actions, intentions, thoughts, efforts, livelihood, attention and concentration.

How can we Purify the Heart? By understanding the nature of our psychological realms and dealing with them accordingly. Emotions are sudden and intense reactions which can change as swiftly as they come, like a storm. Hence, decisions based on strong emotions are often not stable or sustainable. Moreover, feelings of resentment, guilt, envy, hatred etc trap us and hijack our ability to view people and situations with a clear mind. In contrast, Sentiments such as compassion, gratitude, courage etc are feelings which are deeper, more stable and lasting. They also bring out the best in us. It is said that **“there are feelings which wrinkle the face and the soul and there are feelings that endow them with the brilliance of youth.”** (2)

To purify the heart means to free it from the tangles of turbulent emotions and nurture complementary sentiments from the higher realms of ourselves. This means, to consciously evoke in ourselves Courage in the face of Fear, Tolerance instead of Anger, to correct and redeem ourselves instead of agonizing with Guilt, and to overcome Selfish impulses with Generosity. This may sound difficult but is possible when we are determined to be the best of who we can be.

Integrating the Heart and Mind

We can conclude that both the heart and the mind are essential for us in their own unique ways. When we learn to work with both of them in a conscious manner, we can express the best of what they have to offer, and can begin to recognise our true potential. To address the dichotomy mentioned in the beginning, it's not a question of Heart OR Mind. We need to lead our lives with the Heart AND the Mind.

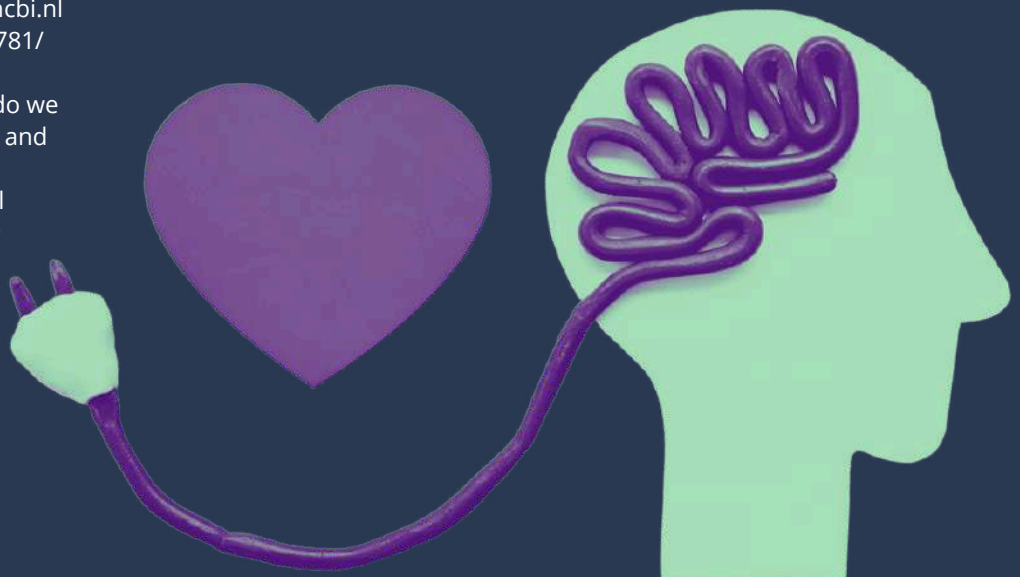
What the world needs today is this unified approach; whether in medicine where specialists come together and offer a wholistic treatment rather than just organ specific intervention; or on the social front, where communities need to come together and learn to coexist harmoniously. What is needed, is to harmonise the voices of our heart with our mind: **The heart gives the direction, and the mind executes it.**

“Your heart knows the way. Run in that direction.” Rumi

To integrate the heart and mind requires a union of our thoughts, our purest emotions (sentiments) and our highest aspirations (values, ideals), with all three converging into action. Working with them in a fragmented manner leads to a distorted and superficial approach. To come closer to our highest human potential means endeavouring to come closer to the archetypes of Beauty, Goodness, Truth and Justice. This requires the Heart and Mind to walk hand-in-hand, in unison and in harmony. ☺☺

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TRAVELLING BEYOND: EGYPT

Explorations with New Acropolis India
Part 2 – The Egyptian Temple as a Metaphor for Life

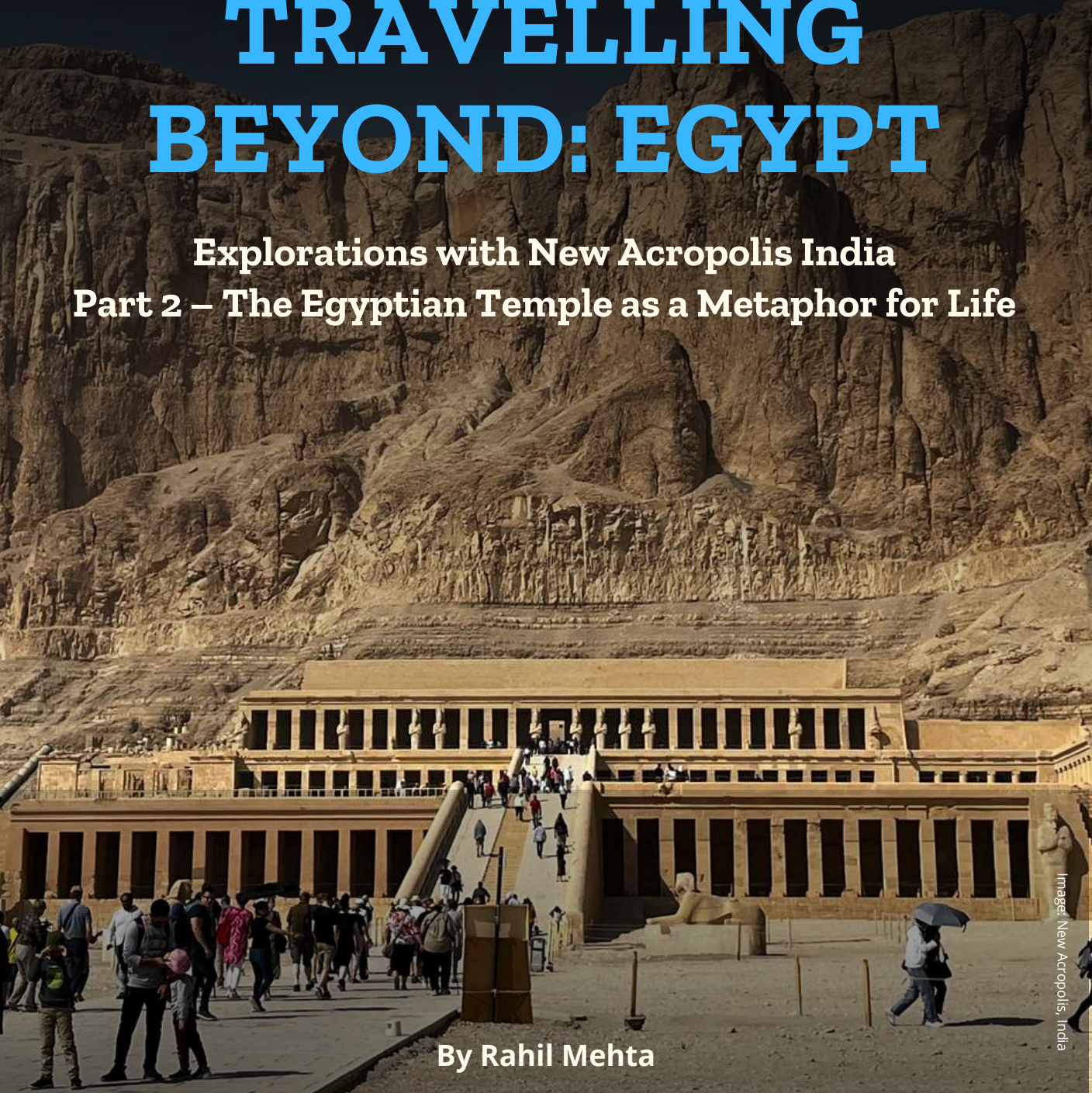


Image: New Acropolis, India

By Rahil Mehta

Traveling Beyond: Explorations with New Acropolis India, is active travel for the aspiring philosopher; to come closer to the rich human heritage of lands and cultures across the globe. The philosophical way encourages us to come closer to what lies "beyond" - the invisible causes of what we observe, such that we may recognize the underlying unity that links humanity. This article is Part II in our learnings from our travel to Egypt. It is my reflection on the Egyptian Temple and its enigmatic connection with the meaning of human life, inspired by what we encountered as a group during the exploration.

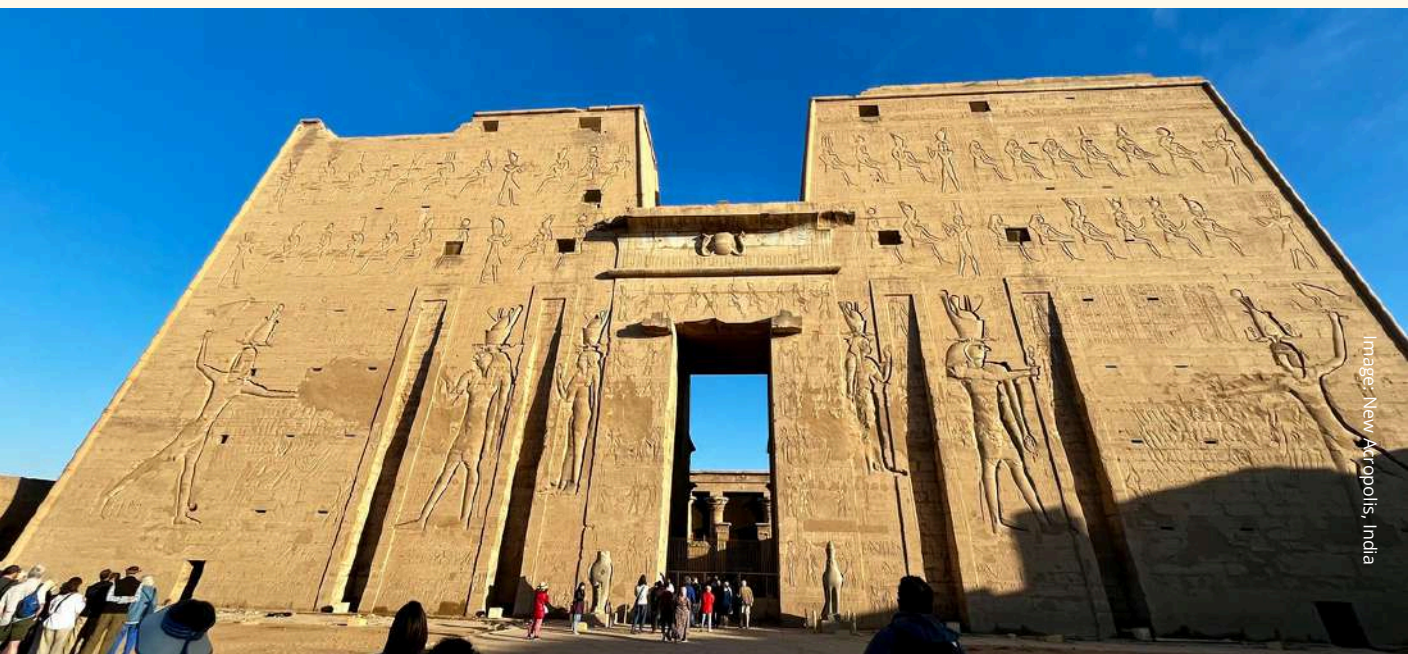
It is said that in the ancient Egyptian civilization everything was imbued with meaning. Each aspect played its part within the whole, and this resulted in a harmony where elements were intimately connected with each other.

This is beautifully encapsulated in the idea called "neter".

This word means both sacred and meaning, implying - that which plays its role and fulfils its purpose is sacred. For example, the river Nile, when it overflowed and brought the life-giving fertile soil to the land, was considered "neter" or as fulfilling its purpose. The pharaoh fulfilling his role as the spiritual king and representative of the divine, was "neter". This idea spurred a reflection through the travel: what does it mean for us human beings to recognize our purpose and bring meaning to our lives? To be "neter"...

The First "Beyond"

The setting of many Egyptian temples is the clamour of vendors peddling their wares, and the noisiness of a busy cityscape; a picture of the transitory haze where it is so easy to lose our attention to the real essence. In a stark contrast to this, the temples with their massive gates and imposing elements exude silence and eternity. They are a symbol of enduring for thousands of years, witness to the cycles of human civilization.



This juxtaposition between the transitory or mundane (the busy streets) and the resilient or elevated, (the temple) can easily be missed by the casual visitor, but for the philosopher who looks deeper, it is apparent that here is a mystery to unravel.

This contrast serves to underline the idea that the temple is a bridge between the human being and divinity or the sacred. While the temple stands generously offering its service, human civilizations pass – in a more or less frenzied pace, reaching varying heights of inner depth, and falling yet again to the decline of materialism.

This could be a call to observe that this separation between the transitory and the eternal also exists within us, and to search for the meaning of the temple is to search within, for that which is resilient, eternal and stable. This is the first “beyond what meets the eye”. Our successive visits to the various temples made this assertion more alive.

Entering the temple then is truly to enter a sacred space, if we raise our gaze to look higher and deeper.

The Temple as a series of Transitions

Taking inspiration from a symbol of steps, related to the Egyptian goddess Isis, we can observe the journey of life as a series of steps of a staircase. To take a step, is to face an internal challenge, grow from this challenge, discover a deeper dimension and rise up, only to encounter the next step. At each step up, we leave a step behind, and yet each step is a necessary experience to move forward in the quest for a meaningful life.

Like the ascending stairs of Isis, the Egyptian temple also has different sections, each with its characteristic features and its unique purpose. Traversing the temple, the transition between the sections seemed intentionally pronounced and significant.

To take a step, is to face an internal challenge, grow from this challenge, discover a deeper dimension and rise up, only to encounter the next step.



If the temple is a bridge to the eternal for the human being, successive parts of the temple would correspond to advancing levels of consciousness, and the temple as a whole holding a key to the development of inner human potential.

As each stage progressively correlates with a deeper experience and integration with life, it would also correlate with more responsibility and rigour. Only the one who needed to enter and was able, could access each part.

The Horizon

The Egyptian temple starts with an avenue or a path which is often lined with a row of Sphinxes on either side, usually perpendicular to the river Nile. Looking toward the temple from the avenue, we

see that the temple is set at the horizon.

The horizon is symbolic of mystery – a dimensionless line of encounter between the land and sky, the mundane and the sacred. Do we recognize that we human beings are at such a confluence? The need to grow and discover ourselves and the fear of change arising from it, both lie within us. The call is to embrace and balance this dual nature, and move forward toward the horizon.

How do we do this? The temple at the horizon also shows a path toward it, through the temple.

This path appears to converge to a point at the horizon and this illusive point is the goal, beckoning us to embark upon a journey.



The Pylon

Walking down the avenue brings us to the huge facade with an entrance in the center. And what a sight it is! The entrance has a huge obelisk and a seated pharaoh on either side. The obelisk at its peak seems to connect to the energy of the celestial, and the pharaoh serves as a protector and guard. Entering the temple is a moment of transition. To go past the gate is to leave the casual behind. It is as if to embark on an adventure with a sense of purpose, with a determination to move toward the goal while shedding some old tendencies that we know hold us back. It is as though the pharaoh challenges the one who wishes to enter and to pass him is to respond from within, with clarity and conviction.

The Open Courtyard

Passing the entrance of the temple we first encounter the open courtyard. Today a tourist can walk right through all the way to the innermost part, however we learn that it was not always so.

The open courtyard was a place where every Egyptian could go. It represented the day-to-day life. Entering the temple with the right orientation, we can experience the meaning - that the Open Courtyard is a place to encounter the sacred in the daily life. To strengthen the decision to grow and elevate in daily life, to recognize the challenges and be committed to grow from these challenges.

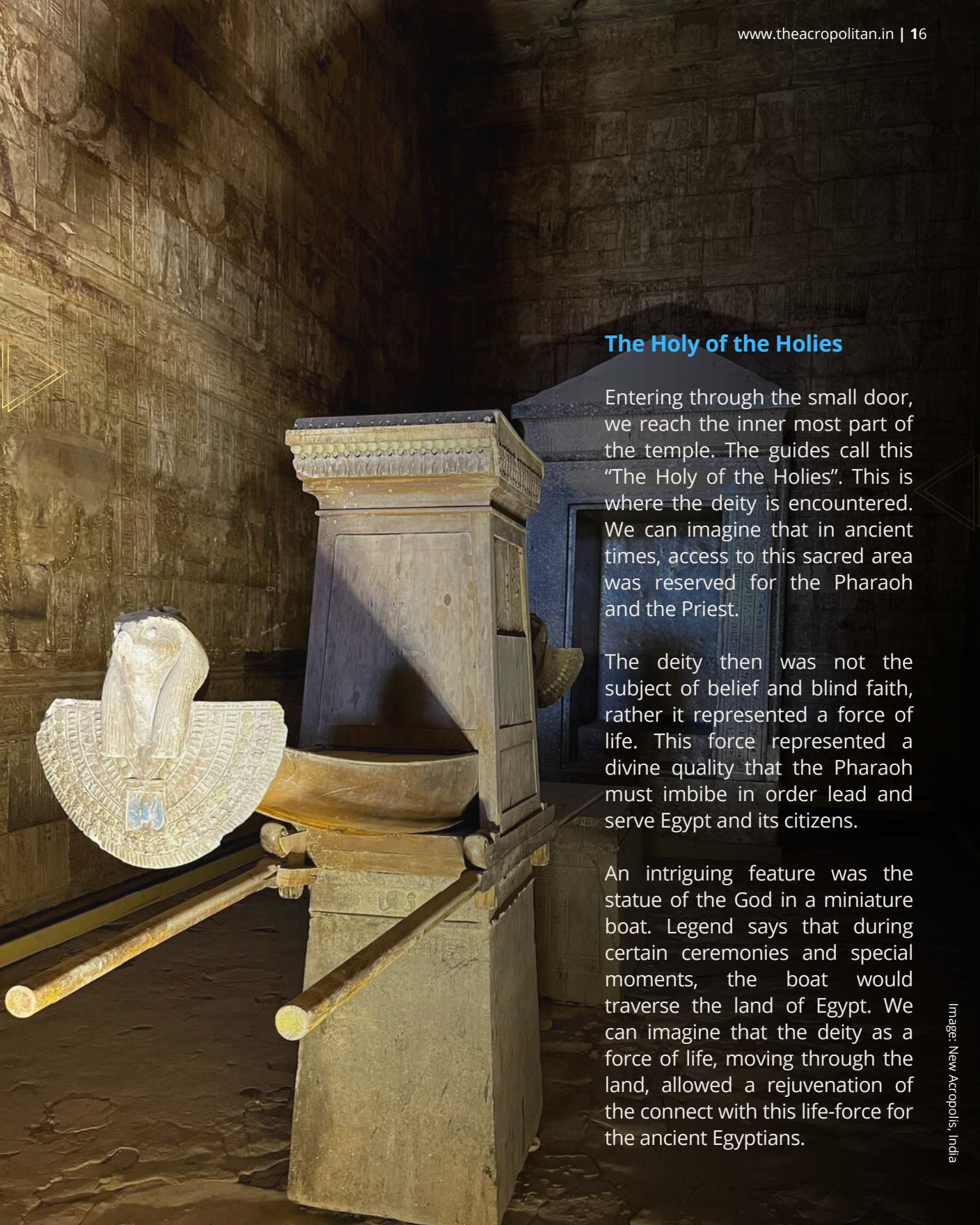
This also relates the idea of purification and renewal, not only physically and energetically, but also in our clarity of what are we a part of, what are we truly looking for. This stage is already challenging in our times today.

The Hypostile Hall

Crossing the Open Patio we come to the hall of pillars. Carved into the gate to this hall is the Amon – Ra or the “winged sun disk” a symbol of the human soul ascending beyond its material limitations. Its stately presence presides over this transition to a stage with more depth and meaning. This hall has a ceiling which is symbolic of the sky and is replete with intricately carved symbols related to the deity of the temple. Grand pillars throughout the hall connect the floor to ceiling, the earth and sky. And skylights in the ceiling are said to be placed with accurate calculations to highlight different parts of the hall corresponding with the solar cycle through the year. To us, it created a mysterious play of light within the hall. The pillars where they touch the ceiling (sky) are crowned with open and closed forms of lotus and papyrus flowers.

This hall called the “hypostile hall” gives the feeling of an encounter with something much more subtle, invisible and mysterious. It appears as a stage between the earth and the sky, or a garden of flowers growing in the marshes of the Nile and reaching for the sky.

At the far end of the hypostile hall is a door often small in size leading to a sacred place, the inner sanctum. Hence the hypostile hall is a stage of transition separating the tangible and intangible worlds, probably meant for the select few who were ready to work with its mysterious nature.



The Holy of the Holies

Entering through the small door, we reach the inner most part of the temple. The guides call this "The Holy of the Holies". This is where the deity is encountered. We can imagine that in ancient times, access to this sacred area was reserved for the Pharaoh and the Priest.

The deity then was not the subject of belief and blind faith, rather it represented a force of life. This force represented a divine quality that the Pharaoh must imbibe in order lead and serve Egypt and its citizens.

An intriguing feature was the statue of the God in a miniature boat. Legend says that during certain ceremonies and special moments, the boat would traverse the land of Egypt. We can imagine that the deity as a force of life, moving through the land, allowed a rejuvenation of the connect with this life-force for the ancient Egyptians.

The Journey through the Temple - the human journey

As we walk through the temple and toward the horizon, the ceiling progressively lowers while the floor rises gently upward. We move from the tall pylons and the open courtyard to the profound, humbling, smaller inner sanctuary. This can be viewed as an invitation to deepen how we live, to grow through an inward search, and rise up internally... It is to dare to take bold steps towards unity.

Each stage of the temple, as in life, is indispensable, and whichever stage corresponds to us, wherever we are, is the right place for us. At each stage of life the connect with the deeper, stable and eternal axis of life is possible and necessary. To make and strengthen this connection does not depend on our circumstances, but rather on our own decision. This is our role.

Traversing the avenue of the sphinx, and facing the Pylon, we cannot know the sanctum. This is how it probably was for a majority of the population, who may never visit the inner sanctum during their lifetime. But maybe this was not an impediment to live life fully. Within each sacred stage, lay the key for advancement. And this is something to ponder over in our lives. As long as we dare to move steadfastly upward and forward from our present context, the next step, what is "beyond" will reveal itself.

The ancient name for Egypt was Khem, related to Alchemy and transformation. As our teachers tirelessly remind us, what we seek lies within each one of us. We should be a force that ushers in this transformation towards unity and connectedness. I believe the magical land of Egypt and its temples can be a catalyst, if the search is sincere and authentic. ☪☪

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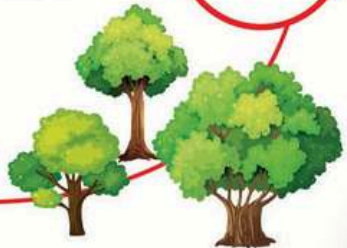
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The Ancient Tradition of Kalaripayattu: In conversation with Lakshmanan Gurukkal

By Axelle Defrasne



Shri Lakshmanan Gurukkal hails from a traditional Kalaripayattu family. His father and guru, Shri Veerasree Sami Gurukkal who trained under Guru Govindankutty Nambiar, established the Hindustan Kalari Sangam in Calicut, in 1952, to preserve and promote this traditional martial art form. His children Shri Lakshmanan, Shri Shatrughnan and Smt Radhika are now carrying forward this tradition.

In 2010, Shri Lakshmanan Gurukkal founded Kalarigram, near Auroville, as a traditional Kalaripayattu training center, that conducts classes and workshops in the intersecting disciplines of Kalaripayattu, Ayurveda, Yoga and Meditation. In his mission to revive Kalaripayattu, he is also the vision behind Tantrotsav, Kalarigram's annual Temple Festival that celebrates and promotes Kalaripayattu, Tantra, Art and Culture. The festival unfolds over a span of 2 weeks and culminates on the night of the Maha Shivaratri, (the great night of Shiva, the cosmic dancer), and commemorates Lord Shiva's execution of the Tandava, the divine dance of cosmic creation, preservation and destruction.

I have had the privilege of studying under Shri Lakshmanan's tutelage a few weeks a year since 2018. For me, the practice of Kalari is like a detox, physically, emotionally and mentally. It extracts everything out of me, engenders values such as humility, inner-silence, empathy and each year that I go, I am able to encounter myself a bit more. All of this impelled me to author this article, and allow him the opportunity to explain the deep philosophy behind his teachings. Below are excerpts from our conversation, in his own words.

Q: What is Kalaripayattu and what are its origins?

A: Kalaripayattu is a martial art, but as is true for every form of art, it is more about a way to live than a physical practice or a sport. Kalaripayattu is a very complete practice; of course, there is the physical practice of the martial art, but also elements of Ayurveda, diet, treatment, massages, spiritual practices, and rhythm... It is a powerful practice that covers all aspects of life.

Kalari was part of the culture in South India, it has Sanskrit roots and follows the cultural structure of Mother, Father, Guru and God.

It is very related to the maternal aspect of culture and has a strong connect to Mother nature. Everything in Kalari and life in general has the quality of the mother.

The British banned Kalaripayattu during colonization. Perhaps they were fearful that such a practice builds strong warriors. So, the ones who wanted to continue the practice had to hide.

But today the practice of the Kalari should be spread again to help people build those roots and strengthen their connect to the divine Mother.

Q: What is the link between Kalaripayattu and mother earth, and the divine energy?

A: The Kalari practice is an invitation to connect to the mother energy, an energy that helps us to have a strong foundation, to develop roots, to connect to our true identity as a human being. Not just cultural roots but also a deeper connection to myself starting with the personality. Developing strong roots allows you to be in charge of, in control of yourself.

For example, we practice Kalari in a mud pit, which has a special meaning. The 5 steps that take you into the pit relate to the 5 elements.



Martial arts are not about killing. Martial arts are about learning to live...

You go deeper inside the earth, to a more grounded level, almost like a mother's womb. This is where the *kundalini* is coiling, the serpent power. The Kundalini is the *pranic* energy that connects you to the mother, giving this sense of oneness, a connection with that light.

This martial art connects you with the mind and energy, the spirit and matter, the concepts of *Prakriti* and *Purusha* in Sanskrit. All matter has spirit. We need to use everything that we have around us to connect to life. The divine energy is constantly present; it is up to us to learn to connect to it.

This is what the tantric tradition says: the higher, *Shiva* is static, it just is. *Shakti* is the movement, the becoming, that is needed to connect to Shiva. We need both to be in interaction. The training helps in this, and therefore, to know who I am.

Q: The physical practice of Kalaripayattu is related to animal postures. What is the meaning of this symbolism?

A: We live our life here on earth with our senses and our personality. We have a lot of things in common with animals. Human beings have an animalistic part, a physical, energetical and emotional body. These bodies are very useful tools to experience life as we do today but they are also very impulsive, or can be impacted by inertia... so, it needs to be in control so that one can reveal the light. If the impulses control you, you will never be able to connect to the light.

The practice of animal postures represents life, it helps us to connect to our animal energy better and use it better.



...in the tradition, the practice is not only something good to do, it is a way to live life.



The practice helps one to release those animalistic instincts, to not keep them inside, as they might grow and take over. It is a cleansing of the instinctive behaviors and impulses in order to learn inner tranquility and to better use our tools, body and mind. The practice of animal postures helps to remove the emotional blockages. Only then can you see your light.

The Kalari practice emphasizes the need to cut and remove the blockages, not to hide them or suppress them or find techniques to go around them, but to really remove the veils. This decluttering is an inner cleansing that will free you so that you can find inner silence. That inner silence is what can make one touch happiness.

Q: In Kalarigram, there are classes every day, you never take a break?

A: Break from what? (laughing).

You have to understand, in the tradition, the practice is not only something good to do, it is a way to live life. Therefore, there is no such thing as taking a break.

You have to develop appropriate mental qualities that you need to be able to clean and strengthen the inner.

This is the journey. All our philosophical texts, the Upanishads, the shastras, say the same: Finding where you are emotionally blocked, and removing the blockage takes constant practice and regular work. That is why we also worship Kali in Kalari. She is the goddess of Kalari. To find strength in nature, as a source of energy, in order to develop the roots, is the energy of Kali. That strength becomes beauty, it helps one to enjoy life and live in harmony with nature. The practice and physical training will help so that the breath can open; then through the breath to the mind; then to focus the mind to see the light. It is the inner journey from the physical to the spiritual level.

For me, this is the purpose of life, therefore I don't need to take a break from it and there shouldn't be any break also for those who want to embark on this journey. With regular and constant practice, you can become one with the Universal Mind, find that oneness within. You are able to catch a glimpse of the Universal Mind that is One, through that dance, that is Kalari.

On a lighter note, whatever I do and enjoy is not work. If you like what you do, you don't need rest, you are energized and empowered by it.

It is to take that inspiration, so that you do things passionately. In that kind of life, you don't need rest, you want to do it continuously because you recognize that it serves you, society and life in general.

Q: Many traditions speak about the master-disciple relationship; is it important in the practice of Kalari?

A: Yes. A very strong link between the guru and disciple develops with time. There is an energy that links the two. The guru gives to the students in order to build the relationship. Through that relationship an energy develops that transmits sympathetic vibrations. Those vibrations are life-changing. It isn't something mechanical, or transactional. This transmission of energy is not an intellectual thing. It is a life energy between the two; *Prana to Prana*. And it is transformational.

First the person who transmits the practice, needs to develop within himself the qualities, like constancy and perseverance in order to be able to transmit them. The one who teaches needs to have gone through the experience and achieved a level in order to transmit. It is not theoretical practice, it has to be experienced to pass down.

Then, in order to be able to transmit, the master must know how they can give it to the student – the student will follow him, so it is important that it is done correctly. At an energy level, if the guru is distracted the student will follow. And the guru guides, only if the student is ready for it. The matching of the relationship is important. If a student wants to embark on an inward journey you can do that only through a teacher and his guidance, according to the tradition.





The goal is to become a peaceful warrior, to develop the strength and beauty of the warrior, to do it from the heart, and find the strength to fight the inner war.

Education is not about one way of teaching, or one way of learning. There are many ways and the education from the guru is to help the student to find their way. A guru is not like a doctor or engineer who can guide you to fix an issue but might have no interest in you at all. Being a guru is not a business, it isn't transactional and if you are doing it like that it is bound to fail.

In the more common way of education, there are common guidelines and it is for the student to figure out. Here, we live together because in this way, you can truly see the person from all angles. Each student also comes from a different background and if I don't understand that, it will be difficult to guide correctly.

A master needs to look at the qualities that need to be transmitted and acquired by the student, and each one will have different ones to work on. Then, if you ask questions, which means something is developing, and if I talk with you, I can understand the root and where you are going. That way I can find our connection and help to channelize your energy in the right direction. This is the kind of education that we give here at Kalarigram.

Q: Today, Martial Arts are sometimes distorted and viewed as Arts of self-defense, yet you speak of it as primarily a spiritual practice that must be revived.

A: Martial arts are not about killing. Martial arts are about learning to live, and this is what we are teaching. It's always relevant to teach people to live better. Whether today or in ancient times, there is always a battle to go through. Once you have strengthened yourself, then you can be in service of the society.

Many people have different spiritual practices because they recognize that we are more than our mind or our intellect. There is some light, this is what we are, but we are often not able to reach it or emanate it because we are not able to connect to it. The practice of Kalari helps to understand what it is, and connect to it.

We imagine that our goal is to be happy. Yet, there are blocks somewhere that don't allow us to be happy, and disrupt the connect to that light. Those blocks need to be removed and the practice of Kalari is mainly focused on helping to do that. Massage, cleansing practice, physical training, concentration and meditation... through these you can

begin the inward journey to clean the blockages, remove the impurities, and connect to that light in a purer way.

In this practice, the *drishti* is also very important, the ability to focus with the eyes on one single point of focus. This helps to learn how to not let the mind wander, as it is one of the goals of the practice to achieve mastery of the mind. Through the meditation and concentration of single pointed focus, you can reach the secure inward environment that is like a mother's womb. That is why we speak of connecting to the mother's energy. There, you are totally fearless. In the outer world you are exposed and you can have fear, it is more difficult to fight the enemies.

Kalaripayattu is a practice of finding stillness, focusing on your problems, on the things that you need to develop or that you might need to kill. The goal is to become a peaceful warrior, to develop the strength and beauty of the warrior, to do it from the heart, and find the strength to fight the inner war.

This is the aim of the practice: *kama* (desire), *krodha* (anger), *lobha* (greed), *moha* (attachment), *mada* (Ego), *matsarya* (Jealousy)... these enemies have to be controlled, they must not be allowed to take over and lead you. Through the practice you learn to not let them disturb you, but the practice has to be rigorous.

Kalari has manifold facets - it is a science, an art form, a ritual dance. It is a divine dance through all the stages, in which you can get a glimpse of the last stage. The dance through which you can access Samadhi, the stage of liberation. ☪☪



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The Indian Express

by Aditri Nair

PANEL ON SACRED GROVES OF THE COUNTRY HELD IN MUMBAI

Amid the ongoing international Mother Earth Day celebrations this week, the New Acropolis Cultural Organisation of India, on Sunday organised a panel on the theme of 'Learning from the Sacred Groves of India', which saw the attendance of Historians and Environmentalists including the author, Dr. Nanditha Krishna and the director of New Acropolis India, Yaron Barzilay.

The New Acropolis is a completely volunteer-run organization dedicated to Philosophy as a Way of Life and for Cultural Promotion which hosted this event in collaboration with Bombay Natural History Society (B.N.H.S.).

From tracing their historical roots from the times of Indus Valley Civilisation to the threats posed by the rapid urbanisation in the modern times, a panel of philosophers and environmentalists converged in the city on Sunday to talk about the Sacred Groves of India — the country's ancient forest patches — which serve as a treasure trove of vegetation, medicinal plants and place of worship for local deities.

With accelerated industrialisation and encroaching posing a grave threat to the country's ancient forests, Krishna, along with her team, has been engaged in the restoration and preservation of the sacred groves. "It largely requires a thorough understanding of



the local community and their culture. By doing so, they can ensure that the community's beliefs are preserved while restoring the land. After getting a written agreement with the local community, our team focuses on improving the land by preventing degradation or erosion," said Dr. Krishna, adding that the task of restoring a five acre land parcel requires funding of approximately Rupees Three Lakhs.

Speaking during the course of the event, Dr. Krishna drew examples from the Hindu myth of Ramayana and from the Tripitaka, the Buddhist philosophical text, to highlight the role, the Sacred Groves play in spirituality and divinity. She added, "Sacred groves have been very prevalent in Indian culture, dating back to the Indus Valley Civilisation where one could find paintings of Man worshipping the Pipal tree. Mythologically, sacred groves have been regarded as a place of retreat and source of Inspiration where sages would be enlightened".

Meanwhile, Barzilay, director of New Acropolis India stated,

"Mother Earth could be a conscious being which might only reveal its secret and knowledge to those who learn how to respect it and accept that they are part of nature."

Yaron Barzilay, the director of New Acropolis India, also, added, "Sacred groves offer immense ecological contribution, anthropological treasure, a great social value of protecting folklores and traditions, as well as a philosophical or spiritual contribution... As philosophers our interest is to uncover what wisdom lies behind this – our connection with the land, with nature, with life".

When talking about the purpose of the event and need for such panel discussions, Head of the branch of New Acropolis Mumbai, Sivan Barzilay, stated, "As philosophers we look to explore the cause of things, to understand why things are as they are as they are so we can offer real solutions. Our interest is not only in understand things theoretically, but in constructing ourselves, our societies and our environment in the best possible way". ☺☺

[Click here](#) to read the article on Indian Express.





MANY SEEDS, ONE GARDEN:

Learning from the Sacred Groves of India

Compiled by Manjula Nanavati



This is a write-up based on an event celebrating International Mother Earth Day held at New Acropolis, Colaba, Mumbai.

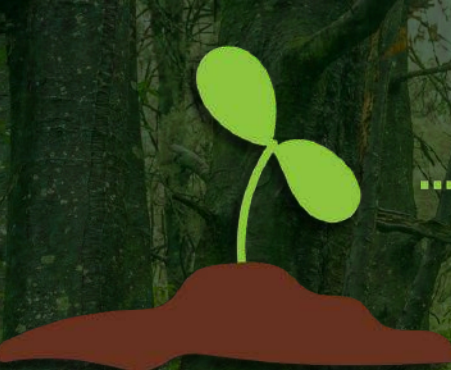
UNESCO has designated April 22nd as International Mother Earth Day to raise public awareness of the challenges to the well-being of our planet, and to recognize our collective responsibility to promote harmony with nature.

At an event, to delve deeper into this, and as part of the international celebrations of Mother Earth Day in close to 500 New Acropolis centres all over the world, New Acropolis, Mumbai in collaboration with the Bombay Natural History Society, invited noted Author, Historian and Environmentalist Dr Nandita Krishna to join Yaron Barzilay, National Director New Acropolis India North, to shed light on the concept of Sacred Groves of India.

Dr Nandita Krishna is the founder of CP Art Center, CPR Institute of Indological Research and the CPR Environment Education Center in Chennai, as well as the Shakuntala Jagannath Museum of Kanchipuram. She is the author of multiple books spanning art, culture, religion, and environment. She has led the restoration of 53 sacred groves in India and is the recipient of several awards including the Devi Award, the Nari Shakti Puraskar, the Stree Ratna, the Outstanding Women of Asia Award, the recipient of a the D.Litt from Vidyasagar University, and most recently awarded the National Fellowship by the Indian Council of Historical Research.

Dr Krishna spoke knowledgeably and shared a plethora of important information about these multi-layered habitats and why we must protect them.

Yaron Barzilay has researched and written a scholastic article on the Sacred Groves of India, to be shared across over 50 countries of International Organization New Acropolis. Never content to be a man of theory, Yaron is putting his work into practice, by leading the effort to create a sacred grove in Raigad, Maharashtra, at Manav Bustan, (which means a garden for human flourishing, and is the rural branch of New Acropolis, Mumbai). His valuable inputs and comments brought out the philosophical wisdom of these mystical spaces, and what we can learn from them to apply to our own lives today.



...may be these sacred groves can tell us about the relationship between man & nature...

Below are excerpts of their conversation at the event held at the New Acropolis main centre, Colaba:

Yaron Barzilay began by saying to Dr Krishna, "Though you don't know it, I am a fan of yours. I was researching a scholarly article on sacred groves & looking for information, and I found lots of ecological and scientific articles and websites, but I found your writing to be so much more than just informative: they opened something with regards to meaning of it, and it showed the love you have for this subject, and that I think is the most important point. Personally I think there is something about the concept of Sacred Groves, that can teach us something.

There are estimated to be more than 1,00,000 sacred groves all over India and if I'm not wrong, only 10% of them have been officially documented. Perhaps these sacred groves that remain are just patches of something much greater that existed in the past. Mythology, Philosophy, Teachings from the Ramayana & Mahabharata are replete with the link with nature. And I thought maybe there is some key, something to investigate. And may be more than finding answers, to find a path of philosophical search. Philosophy is a search, and may be these sacred groves can tell us about the relationship between man & nature, not just a simple link, but that man is an integral part of nature, and when we say nature, we mean the whole universe.

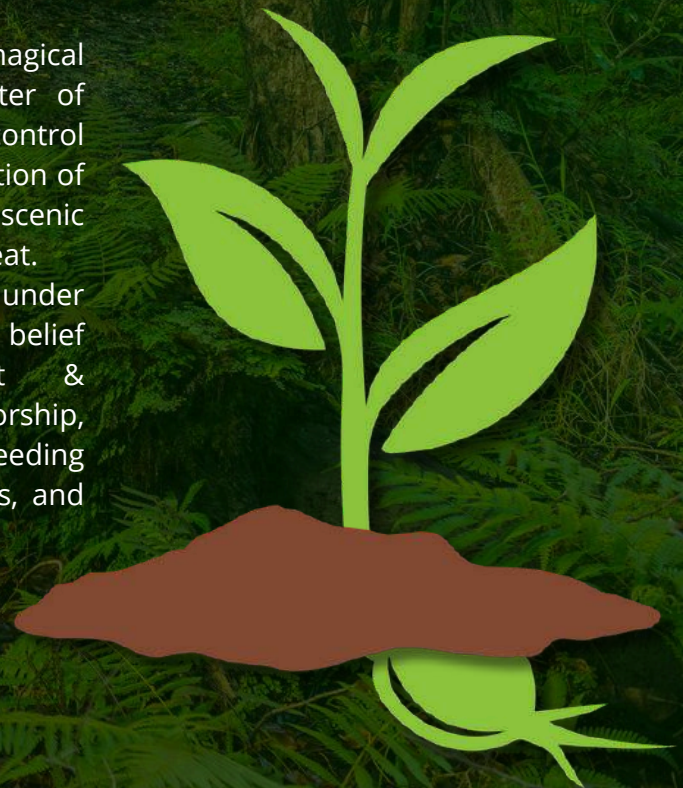
Beyond the biological, anthropological, ecological treasure, and the great social value they have, the folklore, tradition, rituals yes, but there is obviously a spiritual contribution, and for us, we must try to track the reason, the philosophy and the wisdom behind it. And because they still exist, we can do that, we have a unique opportunity to track the connection with land, the connection with nature and the connection with life."

Said Dr. Krishna, "India was once a thickly forested country, & there was a close symbiotic relationship between Man & Nature. Animals and trees were the first objects of worship in ancient civilizations. Indian sacred ecology begins from the Indus Valley, as depicted in seals from Mohenjo-daro circa 2500 BC. In the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna says, *I am the earth, I am water, I am the air*. In the Vedas, nature was a part of an indivisible life force, which united the worlds of human, animal and plant. Sacred forests & groves were an important part of the culture of Pre-Christian Europe, Shintoism in Japan, Taoism in China, and of course Hinduism, Jainism & Buddhism in India.

The Ramayana & Mahabharata are a botanists delight, enumerating a multitude of forests, rivers, plants, tanks, trees & flowers that were held sacred. Forests were a place for retreat, where sages went to gain inspiration by immersing themselves in the natural beauty and mystical surroundings. The Aranyakas which are an ancient part of the Vedas were compiled by sages living in these forests. Many traditional medicinal plants and trees grew there. They were home to local fauna. They were a unique form of biodiversity where religion & culture combined to conserve ecology in a tradition that goes back to food gathering societies, and are today the single most important heritage of the culture of Ancient India.

Today, these sacred groves survive as patches of forest that range in size between two hectares to several hundred, containing natural, native, endemic vegetation, protected by local communities with a spiritual connection shared by the land and the people. Normally dedicated to a Mother Goddess they are protected through strong taboos and afforded a great degree of sanctity. Many tribes forbid any human interference in the sacred groves. Tree felling and hunting of animals are strictly prohibited. Leaves, fruits or roots may only be removed for medicinal purposes. In some places, dead wood or dry leaves may be picked up to cook the *prasād* (offering to the gods) during a festival. But on a live tree and its branches, you cannot use a knife because using a knife on a tree is like using a knife on a human being. Even children are taught to revere these sites and not wear slippers while entering the grove. Transgression of any taboos invites strict punishment from the local *panchayat* (village council).

The sacred groves are spiritual, sacred, magical spaces that afford many benefits: Shelter of fauna, conservation of medicinal plants, control of air pollution and temperature, preservation of fertility of the soil, retention of water, scenic beauty and inspiration, and a spiritual retreat. Yet today these beautiful habitats are under threat: from disappearing traditional belief systems, urbanization, development & encroachments, changing forms of worship, religious conversions, the pressure of feeding increasing livestock on dwindling pastures, and fuel wood collection."



Yaron added to this idea: "Maybe the reason it disappeared quite fast, is the idea of segregation or separation of the concept of Pantheism (associated with divinity in everything) from Polytheism (a pantheon of many Gods), and monotheism (the tradition of one God). In Acropolitan philosophy, we say that this division between the 3 is wrong, all 3 should exist together & not be separated: one divinity, one sacred life, and the idea that nothing is devoid of theos, the sacred. We need to bring our consciousness to this. One of Dr. Krishna's books speaks about some groves that are dedicated to Parbrahm, the One God, others revere many Gods, specific Gods, and forces of nature; sometimes specific sacred trees or sacred animals. So sacred groves teach us that the segregation between these 3 concepts exists, but they are not separate, and to separate them is part of the problem."


Dr Krishna: "Today of so many groves, all over India, we have documented 11,000 restored 53 to health, and have now created a new one. That was the toughest proposition. We started with 2 acres; I spoke to all the village elders asking them what were the plants that grew here, what were the taboos, and rules for maintenance. My team, that included botanists, researched even more, and slowly we expanded to 5 acres and ended up creating a forest of 25 acres. Soon, nature took over and today it is abundant with wild life, even leopards !"

Yaron commented: "There is an ecological point of view that that says that it is better for nature to remove the human being from the ecological chain. An interesting thought, but I challenge that. To remove any element of nature, like the bee, may have consequences that we cannot completely fathom, so to consider human beings as an unimportant element of nature seems counter-intuitive. If we are powerful and have more abilities and definitely more consciousness, doesn't it mean we have more responsibilities towards nature? So perhaps there is a universal message here. The sacred groves can offer us a secret or a hint that will help all humanity: that we are all inextricably linked."

...beyond utilitarian ecology, may be its important to also speak about spiritual ecology: to be one with nature.

We speak of Mother Nature, is it just a metaphor?





...human beings have no dominion over Earth. We are one unified whole.

Dr Krishna agreed: "I would like to end by saying, human beings have no dominion over Earth. We are one unified whole. The *Atharva Veda* says it is up to us, the progeny of Mother Earth to live in peace & harmony with all life. The divine is all, and all life is to be treated with reverence and respect. *Vasudaiva Kutumbakam* is not just a political slogan; it is a family of Mother Earth, one that must promote *Sarva Bhuta Hite*, the welfare of all beings.

If the forests, trees, fresh water and clean air were to disappear, so will all life on earth. And in order to be sustainable over the long term, environmental policies and programs should take cognizance of traditional values and ideals, otherwise they will fail to enlist the local & popular support needed to succeed."

Yaron: "But beyond utilitarian ecology, may be its important to also speak about spiritual ecology: to be one with nature. We speak of Mother Nature, is it just a metaphor? And if it is not, can we treat this beautiful planet as a being? It is philosophical food for thought. Know thyself is a famous phrase, but the entire quote is less well known: *Know yourself and you will know the Gods and the universe*. This implies that by knowing the self, one knows the whole universe, nature, because we are part of it.

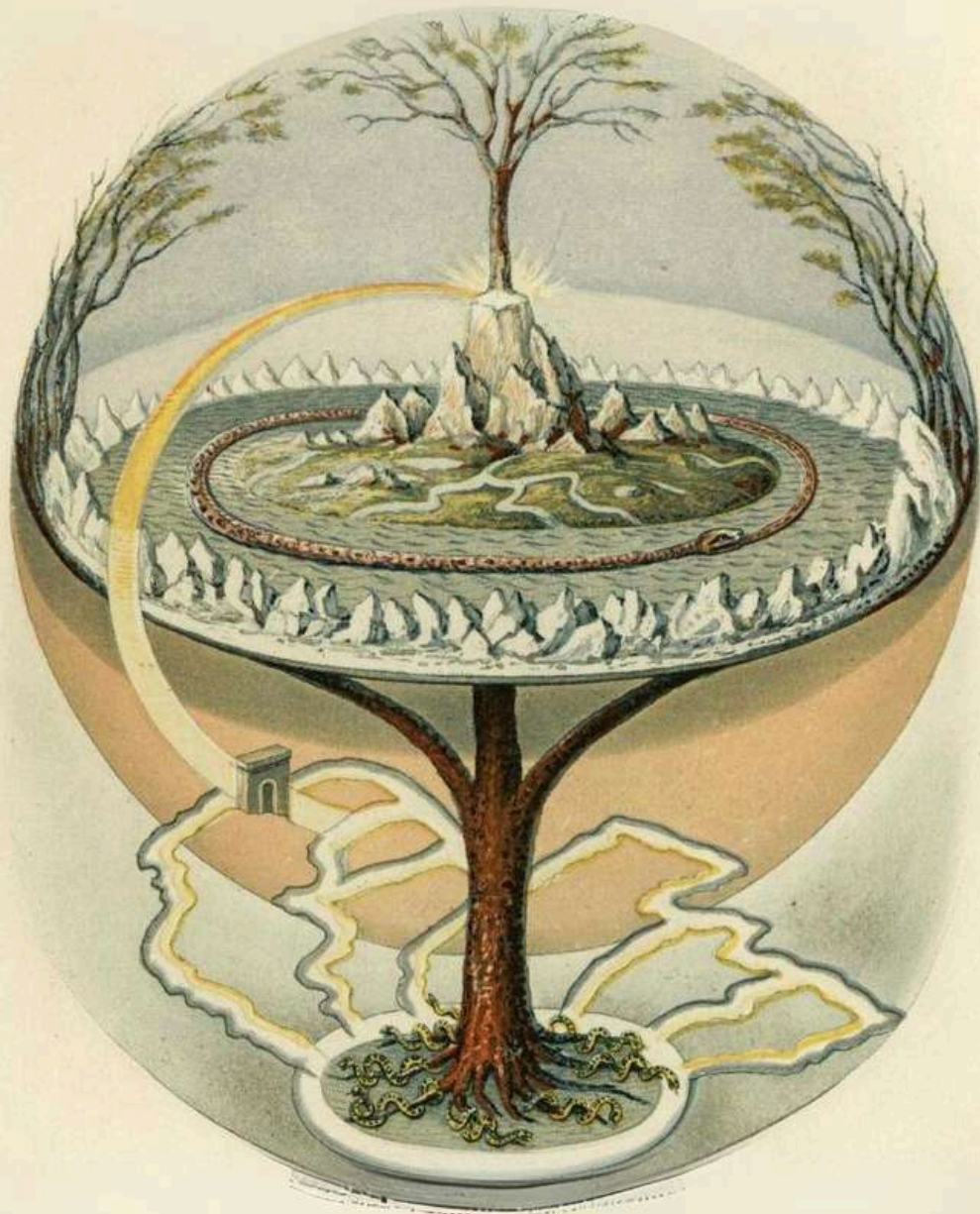
Gandhi has said, '...in nature there is fundamental unity running through all the diversity'. In speaking about sacred groves we often emphasize what these groves can teach us. But maybe we should emphasize the first word – sacred... the unity that Gandhi speaks of. We need to come closer to the unity beyond the diversity of the groves. The sacredness which is not necessarily religious, the unity of life. And we are part of it. And if we don't see that we are part of that unity then maybe we don't know ourselves."

Dr Krishna concluded: "Every person must act for the general welfare of the earth, of humanity, of all creation and all aspects of life. This is the unity which is an essential part of our lives. The Mahabharata says Dharma is meant for the well-being of all living creatures; so, that by which the welfare of all living creatures is sustained, that is Dharma. I would like to end with the *Shanti Mantra*, (the peace prayer from the *Upanishads*) that embodies this idea:

May peace radiate in the whole sky and vast ethereal space; may peace reign all over this earth, in water in all herbs, trees and creatures; may peace flow over the whole universe; may peace be in the Supreme Being; may peace exist in all creation, and peace alone; may peace flow to us and all beings. Om Shanti Shanti Shanti. ☪☪

Plant Lore – A Brief Insight into the Mythology and Symbology of Plants

By Gareth Kinsella



“And just as speech is invention about objects and ideas, so myth is invention about truth.”

- Humphrey Carpenter

You may not know it, but as a child, plant allegories may have left a bigger impact on you than first imagined. Vivid and captivating fables, like conceptual seeds that were sown in your mind through fairy tale and superstition.

Plant lore, like any other, has its roots in vague beginnings, and prior to any records it was reiterated in oral tradition, passed on by the predecessors to the next in line. Until scribes made these unwritten accounts noteworthy, the context of these stories would be susceptible to change, altering in the course of transmission.

Eventually, these iterations were literalised, plant themes inked into symbol and metaphor, laced into detail within the frameworks of paganism, religion, alchemy and art. Plants themes are ubiquitous, yet distinct in their motifs, underpinned by the region’s peculiar flora, its characteristics and elicited effects. The Cacti in central America, Myrrh trees in Arabia, or Sausage trees in Africa, each native with individual myths.

Despite many plant species, there are also constants, like the constituents to what makes a tree a tree, which prompt similar themes. The Tree of Life is a universal archetype, detailing the unification of the underworld (roots) to the transcendental realms (flowers), that can signify a map of our inner suffering and awakening. A popular example of this figurative tree is found in the Grimm’s fairy tale, “Spirit in the Bottle,” an alchemical concept where a boy encounters revelations after discovering the life spirit in a bottle, at the roots of a large Oak.

Mandalas are another theme, projecting a geometrical symmetry of symbols like that of a flower head, as used in Hindu, Christian and Mayan tradition. A Flower’s bloom reflects the seasons like a salute, or a marker on nature’s calendar. Spring flowers such as Iris symbolise fertility for its sensual appearance, and a rainbow for its gleaming iridescence.



In a German folk tale, the snow used to have no colour, so the snow asked the flowers to share some of their vibrant hues, all of which stubbornly declined and were repelled by the snow. Only one showed pity with a drooping head: it was the 'Snowdrop,' who shared with the snow its pearly white splendour.

Various plants are eponymous of legends or epics in myth; the very term 'Flora' derives from the Roman deity Flora, a goddess of spring blossoms, fertility and vegetation. The Narcissus flower is another example, also known as the Daffodil. Greek myth has it that Narcissus paid no attention to his adorer Echo, as he was too busy being self-consumed, spellbound at his own reflection, eventually wasting away and morphed into a daffodil. Subsequently, the narcissus flower has been known to symbolise a one-sided love relationship.


The Irish Druids, on the other hand, were named after their sacred tree of worship, the Oak, the life force of their Gods. Druid translates to 'Man of the Oak', and to catch a falling Oak leaf would signify good luck. So large was the Oak, it took the brunt of lightning strikes, and for each strike it took, it received a mistletoe from the Gods. It's a symbol of protection, as is the evergreen Holly tree through autumn and winter. Holly sprigs were used in divination and hung as wreaths in homes to ward off evil.



In ancient China, Xiwangmu, Queen mother of the west, feasted on the peaches of immortality, which took three thousand years to ripen in the paradise of Mount Kunlun, and invited other Taoist Gods to her divine banquet to indulge in the juicy immortal flesh. Taoist sorcerers were later known to possess wands made of peach wood to dispel danger, and used their petals to induce enchanting effects on men. To receive a peach in China is a blessing for longevity; peach blossoms are carried by brides as a token of prosperity and peach wood is woven into jewellery as an amulet.



The story of the Rudraksha (Sanskrit for Shiva's teardrops) is a Hindu folk tale of Shiva going into a deep meditative state, with his eyes shut for millennia. The meditation induced a state of supreme bliss, he cried elated tears that fell onto the Earth and manifested themselves as the seeds of the Rudraksha tree. Today, these particular seeds are made into a string of beads and worn like a necklace. They can be counted through the palm during contemplation and dangled over food to signal whether you should eat or not, depending on their rotation.

These are just a few brief examples of countless tales and ideas that have rippled through history and lured us with wonder. Just as a honey bee transports pollen from one flower to the next, ensuring the plants will come again, so our ancestors have transported stories for their offspring to reap and sow. 

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Celebrating Arts Day 2024

Many Traditions, One Essence: Seeking Beauty through a Diversity of Expressions.

Compiled by *The Acropolitan Editorial Team*

New Acropolis, a school of practical philosophy present in over 50 countries, celebrated Arts Day 2024, in recognition of the value of art and culture in all their myriad expressions, to individuals and to societies. India North, comprising the main centre Mumbai and the Pune branch, hosted an event at each location on June 9th, entitled Many Traditions, One Essence: Seeking Beauty through a Diversity of Expressions.

In keeping with the New Acropolis theme of the year **Towards Unity Through Diversity**, these events presented rich and diverse expressions of art and culture, with one unifying principle, the search for Beauty in all its multifaceted forms.

Culture is the thread that allows for the continuation and transmission of human values and wisdom across generations, and the arts are an expression of that timeless knowledge that must be preserved as part of our human cultural legacy. Therefore culture is one of the pillars of New Acropolis as its purpose is to enable us to interact, create, express and share noble sentiments, in an effort to build better individuals and societies, that recognise themselves as unique, but also take pride in being an integral part of an interdependent, unified whole.

Towards this end Pune held a symposium over the whole day, comprising interactive workshops and presentations that unfolded across a spectrum of artistic expressions that included Dance, Drama, Poetry, Origami, Carpentry, Music and Architecture. Mumbai hosted a 2 hour event that hosted a distinguished architect, an award winning film director, an erudite practicing philosopher, a talented violinist, a skilful Kathak dancer, and a mellifluous Carnatic Singer. In this issue we bring you a synopsis of the essence that was expressed by all the artists in both events.

Part 1 : The Pursuit of Beauty

New Acropolis, Mumbai hosted an event entitled **Many Traditions, One Essence: Seeking Beauty through a Diversity of Expressions**, which brought together artists from divergent genres: Architecture, Film, Philosophy, Music and Dance. Held in the environs of IF.BE, a cultural centre for Architecture, Design and the Arts, housed in an imaginatively re-designed 140 year old ice factory, the audience immersed themselves in the stimulating and creative display. Excerpted below are brief vignettes of the events that unfolded across the evening.



Finding Beauty through Purpose

“Architecture is about living --- not just living, but living together, how communities and societies can grow and become one.” - Architect B.V. Doshi

Architect Sameep Padora and his team have won awards and distinctions that are too numerous to mention, across diverse projects, creating spaces that span homes, hostels, apartment buildings, townships, restaurants, offices, shops, colleges, and temples. Though Architecture is both a science and an art, Sameep finds solutions by asking philosophical questions that read like Zen koans: *In using resources, how lightly can you touch the ground? How do you do more with less? Can technology bring more value to a craftsman’s imagination? Can an international knowledge system that connects the whole world help us enrich what is local?*



The answers to all these questions were displayed in a slide presentation of his projects that illustrated the principles of simplicity, frugality, community building, environmental awareness, historical context & multi functionality.

One project employed construction techniques from 16th century Spain, using state of the art software from Switzerland and building with local material in Maharashtra. Another involved designing modern tools for traditional craftsmen, not to implement their craft, but to allow them to extend their creativity. A Balaji temple designed to go beyond a place of worship, used ecologically treated waste water from a nearby plant as a moat for the temple, as well as serving as a receptacle for harvesting & recharging ground water.

Said Padora, "For me the idea of a project doesn't come from my vision, but finding what the project needs. Kota in Rajasthan is a city that has an incredible number of people migrating every year to study for the IIT exams. So, hostels are prevalent throughout the city. Rajasthan has an incredible history of medieval architecture, And yet when you look at Kota today, it suffers from this lack of identity and lack of historical continuity. So we wanted to learn from the traditional architecture of Rajasthan, the idea of the haveli, and the courtyard and create a hostel building that did not have the standard central corridor with student rooms on both sides. Kota, because of the number of students studying there, also has one of the highest suicide rates in the country, partially because of this absolutely intimidating architecture of banality, but also because of the complete disconnection with each other. So, the final project responds to the idea of Rajasthani architecture but looks at it through the lens of the time that we are in. Conceived with subterranean water recycling, and multiple terraces that open up into the central courtyard, there are bridges across the courtyard that allow for students to communicate across various floors creating a sense of shared space, belonging and community."

By searching for the truth in all his projects, by finding solutions that satisfies the myriad questions he poses, Sameep Padora showcased for us how his pursuit of beauty fulfils a need, and how his search for a purposeful solution can be beautiful.



Finding Beauty Through Principles

"Movies may not solve our problems, but they definitely have the ability to raise the right questions." - Meghna Gulzar

Bollywood film director Meghna Gulzar has many critically acclaimed films to her credit, including *Raazi*, *Chhapaak* and most recently *Sam Bahadur*. What these films have in common is that the lead character brings beauty and meaning to their own lives, and to those around them, through the bold and steadfast pursuit of Justice, Goodness and Truth.

Meghna's personal choices demonstrate the principles that motivate her life. Her success has been hard won. The daughter of acclaimed Urdu poet, lyricist, film director and Padma Bhushan awardee Gulzar, and Padma Shri Raakhee, one of Bollywood's most successful, and feted actors, Meghna said "I would not let my parents pick up the phone and call anybody. And my biggest learning in the process has been that we have this little core of strength which is more than what we imagine it is. It's not just me, all of us have it. It will surprise you and reveal itself to you in relation to the circumstance you are in. The tougher the circumstance, that core of strength will grow accordingly. And to realize that and believe that, for me has been my biggest blessing in the trajectory of my life."



Speaking about her experience in making Sam Bahadur Meghna said “I don't have anything against entertainment but I think there's nothing more tragic than a film that doesn't impact you, touch you, stir you, make you question or make you wonder. Because it takes so much money, effort, manpower, time, and talent, that for it to be something that you forget the minute your popcorn tub is over, nothing could be more wasteful than that.

When I was approached to make a film on Sam Manekshaw, I didn't want to represent him or his life. I needed to bring forth effectively the spirit of the man, who he was and why he was the way he was. Because that is where the inspiration is.

To be the commander-in-chief of one of the largest armies in the world can go to your head if you're not on the right side of the moral compass. But here was a man who had the humaneness, and empathy to treat 93,000 prisoners of war with respect and dignity. He and his soldiers gave up their quarters, and headquarters, for the prisoners at war, at the end of the Bangladesh war in 1971. So yes, he was just, righteous, and principled, and his engagement, whether with his jawans or his prime minister was very honest and true.

I also know that for all of us who worked on this film, there was an internal shift. The value for truth, righteousness and discipline was subconsciously imbibed in our journey. For me the biggest draw to make a film on this man, was that in today's times, it's very important that we have role models, heroes, and ideals. Something that can make us aspirational, and, hopeful, to better yourself, to better your surroundings, to inspire you. So, if we have managed to give that to our audience and then it was worthwhile. “

Principles are the most valuable building blocks of life, and Meghna's films have the power to connect, inspire and awaken something in our hearts, by showcasing the beauty of a principled life.



Living Philosophically, Living Beautifully.



“Living philosophically, living beautifully, we become an example of what it means to be a human being” - Sivan Barzilay

Sivan Barzilay has been a practicing philosopher for 25 years. She is a teacher and head of the Mumbai Centre of New Acropolis, and continues to instruct and inspire her students on how to bring meaning and purpose to their lives.

Said Sivan, “Living philosophically is a philosophy of the heart. It is to develop an attitude that will escort us through all the different aspects of our life, at any moment, in any situation, from the moment that I wake up in the morning to the moment that I go to sleep at night. It is when I'm young and full of dreams, but also when I'm older, approaching the end of what we call life, and preparing myself for the voyage that starts after life. It is to craft our lives with Beauty.

What is Beauty? It is part of life. It is accessible to all of us. And what is interesting is that when human beings stand in front of immense beauty, we start to incline toward it. We start to want to imitate it. One of the most outstanding qualities of humans is the pursuit of beauty: This is something that we can see from the beginning of time in cave paintings, tattoos, decorations on tools, weapons and jewellery, and across all cultures, and socioeconomic strata. Why are we so attracted to Beauty?

Maybe we should start with nature. The universe, it is said, even though it is not obliged to be beautiful, yet it is beautiful. But it also demonstrates a few important principles that can help shed some light on our questions.



It is said that when the universe manifests itself, it expresses itself through a duality, which we call spirit and matter. Life creates forms, because the forms are needed. Through the forms we can experience, and through the experience we can realize. In other words, we can say that life is a spiritual journey based on material vehicles. When the spirit actually expresses itself and leads the matter based on the laws of the spirit, then the creation is a beautiful creation. This beauty is not of the form, it is what the form carries. It is a quality of the spirit, it is within all of us and it is the reason we resonate with beauty.

Just as we have the five senses that can be in touch with the external world, we also have an inner sense, the sense of beauty, with which we can sometimes sense the intangible. Perhaps what we call art is an attempt of artists to connect to this concept of beauty, to grasp it and give it a tangible form.

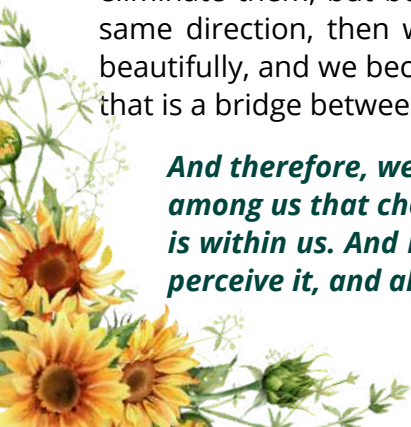
We need to surround ourselves with beauty, because if we don't do that, there is a risk that the sense will decrease and atrophy, resulting in the inability to communicate with beauty of any kind, in spite of all the beauty of life around us.

Nature is a complex unity that contains many different phenomena and elements, but they all work together, are interconnected and interdependent. No part works in isolation. Our bodies too display the same unity through diversity. Composed of millions of cells and different systems, yet all the different elements work together to fulfil the same purpose. If one cell began to work in isolation, it would create what we call disease, and the beauty of the whole organism would slowly erode.

If we extend this to the way we live our lives, we can observe how many different thoughts, emotions, desires, and motives we have, all pulling in so many directions, that it seems like all this multiplicity creates confusion. But in nature, the diversity doesn't create confusion, it creates unity.

How can we bring the principle of unity into our lives? Beauty is one of the answers. When we are able to harmonize all the different parts of our life, not because we eliminate them, but because we allow all of them to fulfil the same need, to go in the same direction, then we create our life as art. This is living philosophically and living beautifully, and we become an example of what it truly means to be a human being, one that is a bridge between the visible and invisible.

And therefore, we should not leave beauty and the pursuit of beauty to only those among us that choose to practice the field of art. Because beauty is for all of us. It is within us. And I would even dare to say, it awaits us. It waits for us to see it, to perceive it, and also to create it within our lives."





Finding Beauty through Unity

"The purpose of Art is to express Beauty" --- Plato

The finale of the evening was entitled Ekatva (Unity), a specially curated performance by Carnatic singer Chandana Bala Kalyan, Kathak exponent Gauri Sharma Tripathi and violinist Nastya Saraswati which demonstrated the beauty of Unity in Diversity. Moving seamlessly from musical solos of classical Carnatic, Folk, Western classical and Kathak, to a duo between Nastya who played a western folk song interspersed with lyrics from Kabir by Chandana. Most inspiring of all was when all 3 artists together amalgamated their different arts and genres into one mesmerizing, unified presentation, illustrating tangibly how unity, beauty and harmony can be achieved through the diversity of uniquely distinct forms.



Part 2 : The Value of the Arts and Culture

At the core of culture is the shared principles and ideals that animate and shape communities and societies: the sum total of customs, morals, values, rituals and belief – systems that are preserved and passed on through generations, engendering a sense of identity, belonging and continuity. They are crucial to a civilization, for deeply embedded in them are the tenets for discerning what is Good, Just, Beautiful and True.

Since time immemorial these core values and beliefs have been shared and expressed through rich and diverse artistic traditions. Ancient wisdom in the form of myths, legends, fables and stories are still communicated through Drama, Poetry, Music, Dance, Paintings, Sculptures and more, contributing to a magnificent and vibrant human cultural legacy. Interacting with this heritage from diverse cultures across the world allows for individuals and communities to better understand and respect each other, promoting acceptance, empathy, tolerance and harmony.

To investigate, interact and promote awareness of the arts and culture, New Acropolis, Pune, held an event entitled Many Traditions, One Essence: Seeking Beauty through a Diversity of Expressions. **A medley of workshops were held through the day, showcasing diverse cultural art forms including Shakespearean theatre, Japanese Origami and Haiku, Carpentry, Dance, Music and Architecture.**



Shakespearean Theatre

Acknowledged as one of the greatest playwrights of our age, Shakespeare wrote plays that dealt with the entire gamut of human emotions and behaviour, always with a universal message of hope or warning for his audience. His theatre group, lacking resources, performed for audiences using very little in the way of production values, sets or costumes, relying instead on the power of his words to unleash the imagination of his audience.

Using extracts from Othello and Hamlet, this workshop highlighted how to make better choices, those that spring from our higher selves. The workshop also invited audience participation in exercises engaging the imagination, carried-out in total silence, using only the imagination to convey and communicate.

Haiku

This Japanese form of Poetry traces its tradition back to the 13th century. It is a concise, succinct, yet profound art that offers deep insights and wisdom. Its brevity, sparseness and simplicity makes it a vehicle that touches the essence of an experience, stripping away the non-essential from the essential. It lends itself to interpretation, encouraging reflection and engaging the imagination. It has the ability to evoke the higher sentiments, universal principles and the great truths of life.

Examples from famous Japanese Masters fostered the appreciation of the form and its characteristics, and participants were encouraged to compose poems of their own, while reflecting on how to live lives of simplicity and clarity, aligned with the universal and eternal principles of life.





Origami

The Japanese art of paper folding began as a ceremonial offering, making something beautiful by folding paper and then allowing it to be consumed in a ceremonial, sacred fire, highlighting the idea of the transience and impermanence of life. The concentration and attention required to make each precise fold is a lesson in patience, diligence and accuracy, while being fully present in the moment without letting thoughts and emotions de-stabilize your centeredness.

The audience participated in a simple Origami exercise of individually and quietly making the rays of the Sun, and using that as a lesson in self-awareness, so as to be able to bring that into their lives.



Dance



Rutuja Marne, a Bharatnatyam artist, shared insights of her journey and transformation through dance. Initially what began as hard work and practice, eventually transcended into something beyond the craft, and through her performance, she offered the viewers a glimpse of this idea.

Through rigorous dedication, practice, or 'sadhana', the absolute focus on the craft allows one to perceive that there is something beyond the self. But it is not about finding who you are, rather, it is about becoming it, by chiseling a path that allows beauty to percolate. It is a journey that requires focus and practice to not allow the personality to overwhelm the essence. When you lose yourself to become the character, or the forms you choose to enact, there is a oneness that is achieved. But it is a delicate balance between achieving the oneness (between the actor and the character) and carrying the 'rasa', the taste, or the essence through the performance for the audience, and not crossing the line.

Bharatnatyam, is an ancient dance form with elegant postures and *mudras*, but more than what one sees, it is what one experiences. Akin to yoga or meditation, the essence is the same: To remain connected to the centre, and then, to share this with the audience. Said Rujuta, "Only when we are connected and do not lose ourselves, is when we can share the beauty which does not belong to us. We are just the vehicle."





Silent Carpentry

Vivek Mahajan of VISDA, an Architecture and Design firm based in Chennai, presented a workshop on the concept of Silent Carpentry. Said Vivek, **“In silence you learn more about your object, and avoid friction, as you can then align your senses, your hands, the tools, and of course, the wood. This makes the process enjoyable and in the silence, there is a sense of calm.”**

He cited his own example, of how in filing wood in silence, he realised he was putting too much pressure on the filing, causing him to exert more energy. When he reduced the pressure, he realised he could work accurately, with more ease. Silence truly can be golden.

“Instead of using machinery and tools,” he explained, “the use of hands can give you the joy of working with wood. He spoke of *“thehrav”*, wherein your goal should be in the joy of creation and not on the object of creation. “Wood is a mirror”, shared Vivek, “and it’s possible that when you have decided to create something, the wood may not act the way you want. Thus, it is important that, you seek guidance from the wood. Each granule, flake structure and rings structure differ in each wood, thus impacting the final product.” To illustrate this he showed the audience various types of wood, including Sycamore, Teak and Rosewood. The interview ended with a lively question answer session on his passion for leathermaking and his love for carpentry.





Music and Architecture

Sachin Das led this workshop which was a fascinating visual and aural journey through Music and Architecture. With a Degree in Architecture, and a passion for music, Sachin wears many hats. His organization Musée Musical, of which he is CEO, and that represents Trinity College, London since 1901, has 2 verticals --- Music Education and Music Technology. He is also National Director of Trinity College.

Said Sachin, "Arts are a way to express emotion, and though music and architecture seem to be such different art forms, yet they both create feelings and emotions, one from sound, and the other through space. Someone once said, **'Architecture is Music frozen', perhaps because they have the same elements of beauty like rhythm, harmony, form, colour and texture, that are expressed differently.**

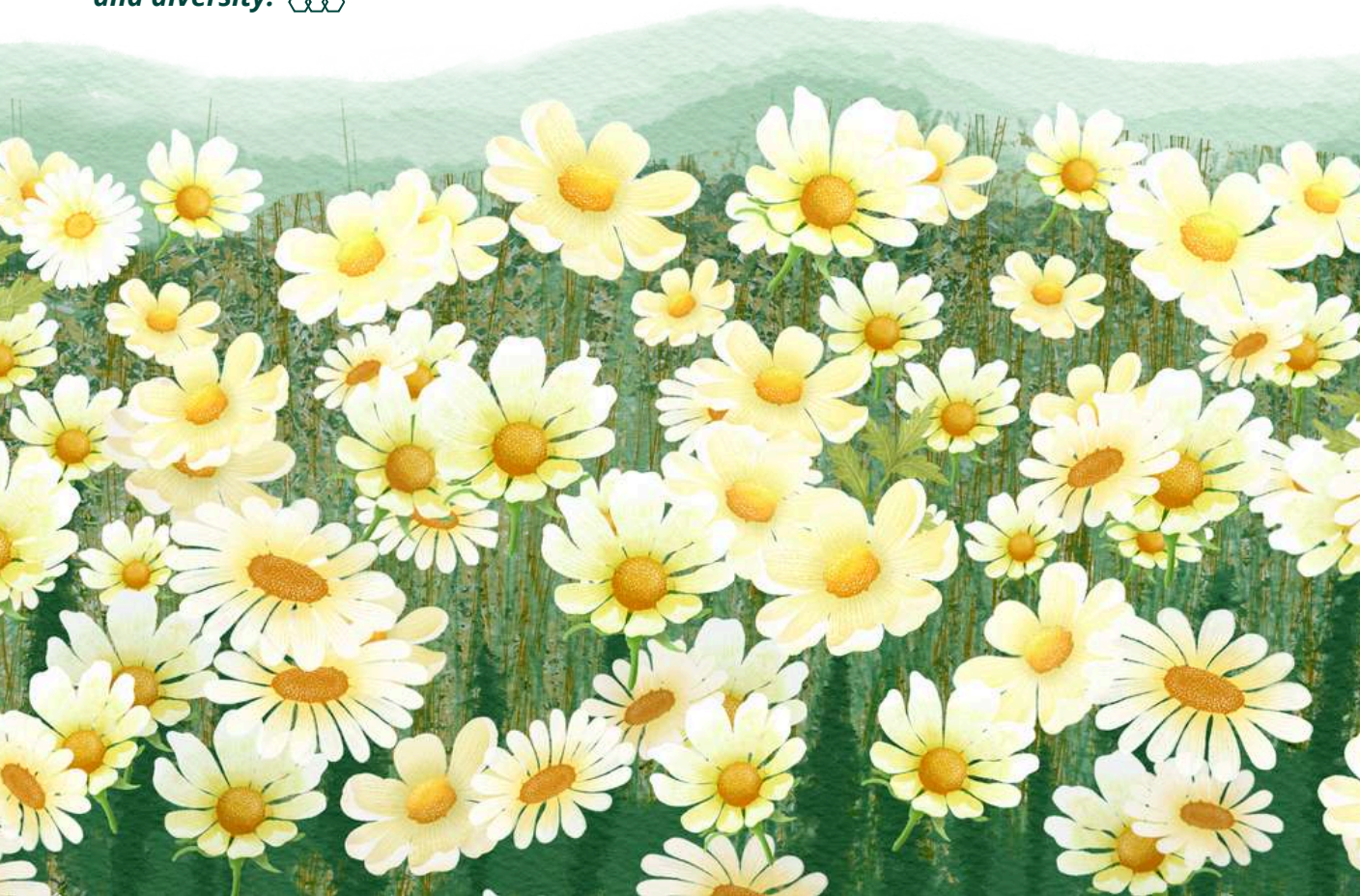
Rhythm in music is a combination of repetitive beats punctuated by silences, and in architecture, repetitive forms, pillars, arches, can create rhythm. Harmony in architecture is to harmonize the building and its setting, so that the eye moves fluidly across the whole. In music diverse instruments collaborate, synchronize, and support each other, while playing in harmonious unison. Form and structure in architecture is evident, and in music, Indian classical and western classical have different but definite forms and structure. Colour and texture is easy to understand in architecture, but music too can be 'colourful' by using sound quality or Timbre . For example, the bansuri has a completely different timbre as compared to the sarod. So also the ornamentation of Carnatic music creates texture."



Using slides depicting works of renowned architects like Frank Lloyd Wright, I.M. Pei, and Antoni Gaudi, along with snatches of music from Beethoven, Bach, Ravel, and Zakir Hussain, this riveting presentation established the connection between these two arts, and perhaps a connection that all arts share. "This is why education in the arts is so important", Sachin ended, "It builds Emotional Intelligence, and perhaps the arts can show you how to bring rhythm, harmony, and structure into our lives."

All the arts require relentless physical and mental discipline, in constantly sharpening oneself, for only then can the artist grasp and transmit the inner essence of things. All art has the eloquence and meditative quality that invites reflection so that what begins as an outward journey for both creator and receiver, becomes an inward search for the highest sentiments and noblest ideals in oneself.

Rabindranath Tagore said "Truth reveals itself in Beauty", and therefore the richness of the arts and culture are an invitation to encounter the invisible through the visible, a search for Truth and Wisdom through the ladder of Beauty. This is the reason they have the ability to resonate across cultures, promoting unity through their vibrancy and diversity. ☺☺



NEWS SPOTLIGHT

This quarter saw New Acropolis India, North celebrate two important events. **International Mother Earth Day**, a UNESCO initiative was celebrated by Acropolitans all over the world and was marked in Mumbai by an event in collaboration with the Bombay Natural History Society titled Many Seeds, One Garden.

Arts Day 2024, a New Acropolis Initiative was also celebrated. Mumbai and Pune both saw artists from such diverse fields as Music, Dance, Film, Architecture, Drama, Poetry & Carpentry come together to explore the value of arts and culture, in an event titled Many Traditions, One Essence: Seeking Beauty through a Diversity of expressions.

While these events are covered extensively in this issue, below is a quick look at other events that took place in Mumbai & Pune.

Public Talks, Workshops, Book Reading...

Stimulating, interactive talks that drew enthusiasm included **Beyond Limitations** that explained how to embrace challenges as a tool for growth. **Wisdom of our Sun** spoke about various Solar myths and the timeless lessons of rhythm, precision and generosity we can learn from the Sun.

In Pune the legacies of **Leonardo Da Vinci** and **Rabindranath Tagore** illuminated the principles of humanism and humanity respectively.



In Pune a **book reading of Moassy the Dog, by Jorge Ángel Livraga Rizzi**, the founder of New Acropolis International Organization, prompted a lively discussion.



In Mumbai an intriguing workshop on Kintsugi, the Japanese Art of highlighting imperfections instead of concealing them, showed how one can look at, accept, and then work on our short-comings, allowing for potential growth.



New Acropolis hosted a talk titled "The Search for Meaning: An Encounter with Ancient Egypt," at Studio at Anokhi Garden in Khar



This quarter saw a variety of Volunteering activities that tied in with the celebrations for International Mother Earth Day. In Pune in addition to a talk by National Director Yaron Barzilay, workshops on establishing Kitchen Gardens, Composting and crafting organic products from natural elements were warmly received.





In Mumbai this ongoing Mangroves sensitization & cleaning up drive saw 40 students from a local high school work eagerly and purposefully with gloves and bags collecting 1000 kg of debris and garbage, including segregating plastic waste, that was given over for re-cycling.



PUBLIC EVENTS NEW ACROPOLIS MUMBAI

**Sat
6 Jul**

Free Interactive
Talk

**6 pm (2 hrs)
at Mumbai Center
(Colaba)**

[Register Here](#)



DEFINING SUCCESS: A PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACH

Our definition of success is usually tied to external achievements, but we rarely stop to reflect on what success means to us.

Is it limited only to external success which includes career and recognition or is there also an inner success which relates to fulfilment, inner growth and overcoming our limitations?

Join us for a philosophical exploration of better defining what truly matters, and how we can design our lives to more authentically align to our very own idea of success.

**Sat
27 Jul**

Free Talk &
Workshop

**6 pm (2 hrs)
at Mumbai Center
(Colaba)**

[Register Here](#)



DISCOVERING MY CENTRE: LESSONS FROM MANDALA

In the many pulls of our day to day, do we get taken by different roles or opinions, sometimes losing our ability to choose authentically? Join aspiring philosophers of New Acropolis Mumbai as we take inspiration from the symbolism of Mandala, in order begin a voyage to our own centre.

Perhaps in discovering and learning to act from this deeper identity within, we will be able to bring more clarity and purpose into the many roles and aspects of my life.

**Sat
24 Aug**

Free Talk
& Workshop

**6 pm (2 hrs)
at Mumbai Center
(Colaba)**

[Register Here](#)



ART OF COMMUNICATION: BUILDING BRIDGES ACROSS HEARTS

In our fast-paced times, we have the ability to communicate with multiple people, through varied mediums with the touch of a finger. Yet are our interactions more meaningful?

Join us as we revive the art of speaking and listening, so that we can learn to connect better with ourselves, with others, and perhaps also with life! Let's explore what it means to connect from the heart and to build bridges between human beings.

PUBLIC EVENTS NEW ACROPOLIS MUMBAI

**Wed
28 Aug**

Free Introduction

**7:30 pm (2 hrs)
at Mumbai Center
(Colaba)**

[Register Here](#)



FREE INTRODUCTION TO LIVING PHILOSOPHY COURSE

**2 hours once a week | 16 weeks
to discover Philosophy as a Way of Life**

Living Philosophy is an opportunity to discover ourselves and the world around us, with the insights of ancient philosophies and human wisdom put into practice in everyday life. Extract practical tools through the course to learn to live with more freedom and sustained happiness. Explore the path of inner change as a key to actively contribute towards building a better world.

This event is a Free Introduction to learn more about what this course offers.

**Sat
14 Sep**

Free Interactive
Talk

**6 pm (2 hrs)
at Mumbai Center
(Colaba)**

[Register Here](#)



STRENGTH IN ADVERSITY: SPARTAN WISDOM FOR MODERN CHALLENGES

The Spartan warriors, best known for their heroic battle where 300 Spartans stood firm in the face of thousands of enemy warriors and ships, faced the toughest adversities with a spirit of victory and courage. More than their physical strength, it was their strong ethics and unbreakable unity that made them formidable warriors known until today.

What inspiration can we draw from them, to enable us to develop greater resilience in the face of our circumstances?

**Sat
28 Sep**

Free Interactive
Talk

**6 pm (2 hrs)
at Mumbai Center
(Colaba)**

[Register Here](#)



FASTER, HIGHER, STRONGER-TOGETHER: LIVING THE OLYMPIC SPIRIT

The Olympic motto "Faster, Higher, Stronger – Together" represents not only the athletic aspirations of the world's top sports competitors, but also ethical values to raise ourselves to everyday.

The history, mythology and symbolism of the Olympic games offer many lessons for us – whether it is that our greatest competition is always with our own selves, that together we are stronger, or that victory lies in facing our own struggles each day. Together we will explore how we can bring the Olympic spirit to our everyday life - always striving to become the best version of ourselves.

PUBLIC EVENTS NEW ACROPOLIS PUNE

**Sat
6 Jul**

Workshop

**6 pm (2 hrs)
at Pune
Branch**

[Register Here](#)



DESIGNING MY LIFE FOR HAPPINESS

Does happiness arrive at my doorstep, tied up in a neat bow? Does it fade away just a few minutes after I hold it in my hands? Or can happiness be sustained as I sail through life, regardless of my circumstances? Philosophy has answers... We invite you for a practical workshop to explore the nature of being happy.

**Sat
27 Jul**

Workshop

**6 pm (2 hrs)
at Pune Branch**

[Register Here](#)



ART OF CONCENTRATION IN A NOISY WORLD

In our constant rush against time and our ever-expanding To Do lists, we often lose our ability to bring our most precious contribution to our actions and interactions – our presence!

We at New Acropolis explore practically how we can develop this essential tool of Concentration amidst the many pulls and voices around us, in order to live with more clarity, depth and fulfilment.

**Sat
24 Aug**

Talk &
Presentation

**6 pm (2 hours)
at Pune Branch**

[Register Here](#)



WISDOM OF OUR SUN: FROM ANCIENT MYTHS TO MODERN INSIGHTS

The Sun... the heart of our solar system, gives life and light, warmth and energy to everything it touches. All living beings are naturally aligned to its cycles of day and night, and seasons. Ancient traditions from the east and west, revered the sun as a source of life, and modern science continues to make incredible discoveries about its nature. What secrets and lessons for life can we learn from our Sun? Join aspiring philosophers of New Acropolis to explore!

PUBLIC EVENTS NEW ACROPOLIS PUNE

**Sat
31 Aug**

Workshop

**6 pm (2 hrs)
at Pune Branch**

[Register Here](#)



WHAT DO WE DO WITH THE MIND & THE HEART?

Our mind can be a powerful tool towards action, yet at the same time, can also cause paralysing indecision. Our heart often knows what is right, but tends to get lost amidst high emotions and impulsive actions. How can we learn to better use the tools of our head and our heart, to bring more clarity and contentment to our daily choices?

**Sat
14 Sep**

Book Reading

**6 pm (2 hrs)
at Pune Branch**

[Register Here](#)



BRINGING 'NEWNESS' IN ROUTINE

A book reading session from 'Life's Deeper Aspects' of N. Shri Ram

Routine could tire us if we fall into automaticity. Sometimes we escape routine by taking breaks, and changing the external circumstance. However this is not always feasible. Is there a key, or a way to bring freshness into the routine of everyday life? Join us, as we explore this possibility from the book and wisdom of N. Sri Ram who was a theosophist.

**Sat
28 Sep**

Talk &
Presentation

**6 pm (2 hours)
at Pune Branch**

[Register Here](#)



DECODING SYMBOLS: THE LANGUAGE OF LIFE

"It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; that which is essential is invisible to the eye" – Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

Ancient symbols such as the Ankh, Yin-yang or the Pyramids, awaken our interest even today. Aspiring philosophers of New Acropolis Mumbai invite you to explore the mysterious and universal language of symbols – to unearth deeper truths about life and our role as human beings.

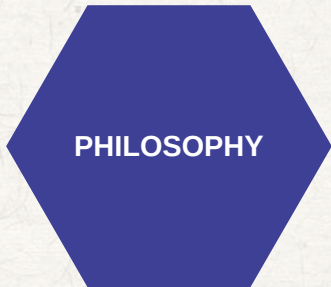
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Philosophy, when it is practical, is educational. It helps us to know ourselves and to improve ourselves. To be a philosopher is a way of life committed to the best aspirations of humanity.



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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