

# **The Joy of Discipline**

A photograph of Earth from space, showing the horizon, clouds, and the sun rising over the horizon. The sun is a bright yellow-orange orb on the horizon, casting a glow over the Earth's surface. The Earth's surface is a mix of blue oceans, white clouds, and brownish-green landmasses. The background is a dark, starry space.

**By Zarina Screwvala**

You may ask what joy can discipline bring? Doesn't discipline suggest a rigid, regimented life? Evoking images of hard work, full of rules and regulations enforced by others that you reluctantly follow? Perhaps, we can learn more if we ask ourselves: Is discipline something that comes from outside? Or from our own will and choices? And where does the joy come? This article examines Discipline and its accompanying Joy from various perspectives.

### **Is discipline natural or does it need to be learnt?**

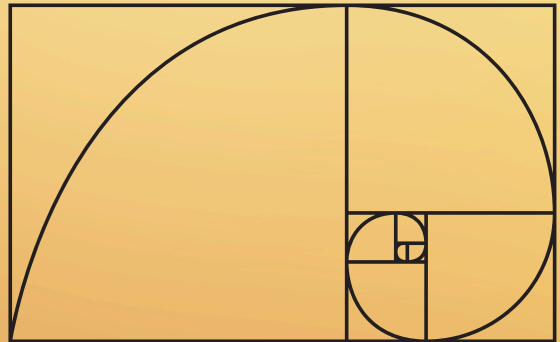
We can take some hints from the etymological roots of the word. The word 'discipline' originates from the Latin *discipulus* meaning pupil and *disciplina* which is a multifaceted word meaning knowledge, order, self-control. It's derived from the root word *discere*, which means to learn.

*Discere* meaning to learn, gives us a hint to the question. When we are young, we tend to learn discipline by observation and practice, demonstrated by the good example of our parents, teachers or other elders. As we grow and practise discipline in the various aspects of life, we begin to see the results of our discipline, and it becomes more ingrained in us.

Kathak dancer, Aditi Bhagwad explains to us that discipline allows her to practise till it flows like blood in the veins, until it becomes a natural part of her art. So

human beings have a choice – to practise discipline or not.

When we look at nature there seems to be an inherent discipline manifesting as order; an underlying intelligent order determined by laws, resulting in harmony, efficiency, and beauty. The mysterious Fibonacci sequence for example, is expressed in myriad aspects of nature, from the whirling spirals of a sunflower's florets to ocean waves, to spiral galaxies. The strict proportion between the numbers gives rise to order, beauty and allows for growth in an efficient way.



In her book *Philosophy for Living*, Delia Steinberg Guzman says "*Order is not a human invention. The whole of nature moves according to a visible rhythm that is the reflection of an order, of a law.*" We can see this in the ebb and flow of the oceans, in the seasons.

We can take inspiration from the way the planets move around the sun, from their perfectly tuned rhythm and harmony with each other, which allows for life to flow in



a particular direction. Delia continues, *"When someone leads an ordered life, they are simply following the dictates of nature"*.

Delia also says, *"If human beings develop in an ordered way their progress will be more marked and they will have fewer problems. Not because the problems don't exist, but because they will be able to find workable solutions within the order in which they move"*.

An example. In November 2023, we witnessed the gruelling rescue efforts of 41 workers who were trapped for 17 days in the Silkyara tunnel in North India. Hope often seemed dim but Dr Rohit Gondwal, who was overseeing their mental counselling outside the tunnel, commended the workers for maintaining calm and "displaying the highest order of discipline." An article in a leading newspaper explained how this played a pivotal role in their own rescue. No doubt this discipline resulted in a great joy! (1)

### **Can anything worthwhile be achieved without discipline?**

Let us consider the world of the Arts for inspiration. For many years New Acropolis, India has offered cultural events with a philosophical essence, investigating Culture as a means to build and share human values. Dhruwad exponent, Chintan Upadhyay shared with us, the experience of his rigorous daily practise of *Swar Sadhana*



which he, like many Indian classical singers, usually start at around 4am every morning. Many artists trained in the classical tradition, often speak of the discipline of the daily practise, as one of the core values they learnt through their art, and in turn it is this practice that allows them to master their art.

Similarly, if we wish to form, mould and build ourselves, we too need the constancy of daily practise. For example, if I have a tendency towards anger and decide I want to overcome it, I need to understand what causes of anger are in me and be on guard when these appear. And then resist this tendency when I notice it arising. None of this can be done without daily discipline.

Discipline allows us to persist when things go wrong. Which they inevitably will. Discipline allows us to keep going and try again in another way. Only then can we taste the joy of a sweet victory, born of our own daily effort.

### **What is the role of a strict framework of rules in discipline?**

We can again look at this from the point of a classically trained singer. Discipline allows the artist to follow the strict framework of rules of his or her art. For example, in music, there are only seven notes within which every artist must compose or perform. This is true of western and Indian music. Within these there are strict rules of music in the

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classical arts from multiple traditions. Tara Kini, classical Hindustani singer, and educator explained that the more the rules, the more classical a form becomes. She believes it is the framework of rules that builds the discipline and concentration needed to apply oneself in one's art. So interestingly: we need to build the discipline to follow the framework of rules and in return the framework serves to guide us to further build our discipline.

One may wonder why do the classical arts need the framework of rules at all? Many artists have explained that this strict framework of rules allows the tradition to evolve, while keeping its essence intact. This resonates with those who practise

within a philosophical framework as well. Strict boundaries form the basis within which to perform various kinds of inner and outer work, experimenting and learning, while keeping the essence, the purpose unchanged.

**What about the creative process? Doesn't this strict discipline of following rules inhibit creativity and freedom?**

The artists don't think so. This strict framework provides clear boundaries, within which an almost infinite variety and

development is possible. Chintan Upadhyay observed that no two performances of Indian Classical music, will ever be the same. It is within the boundaries of a strict framework, that the artist gains the freedom to create his or her own art. The beauty of the world is thus enriched through discipline and structure.

Thespian, singer and movie star, Julie Andrews said *"Some people regard discipline as a chore. For me, it is a kind of order that sets me free to fly."*

Freedom or its absence depends on the form discipline takes. At the most basic level we have discipline which is enforced on us from the outside. If it goes against our own will or what we believe is right, then it is a kind of tyranny. On the other hand, when we choose to discipline ourselves, we begin to see that discipline brings not only joy, but also an essential freedom. The freedom to respond to life in an appropriate manner. Discipline helps us to control our personality with its innumerable impulses, desires, likes and dislikes. We now begin to gain the stability to act as we know to be right. This is a wonderful kind of freedom.

We can ask ourselves: what is the framework I wish to build for myself in order to be free to fly? In order to fulfil the purpose of my life, to live with meaning, service, and Joy?





## Ethics, Service and Discipline

It seems discipline can be applied to everything we do in life – for good or bad. We need discipline to become a good athlete, a ballet dancer or pianist. We need it to be a good mother, in order to arrive at work every day despite tiredness or moods. On the other hand, it is also true that even Hitlers' SS performed their terrible deeds with some form of discipline. However, cruelty & oppression are not a part of the discipline we speak of here. What interests us is a higher discipline, practised to inculcate human values in order to be of service to the world. Disciplined behaviour when it is directed by ethics, when it aligns with values and virtues, with what is Good, True, Beautiful and Just, it serves the good of all. So, to be of Service, discipline needs an ethical base. And this perhaps is the highest form of discipline.

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**Where is the Joy of Discipline to be found? In the actual practise of discipline or in the results that follow?**

Perhaps both. But if we can learn to find joy in the actual practise of discipline, it is a wonderful thing. We cannot really control the result of our actions, but we can learn to control our own inner action and build the persistence and constancy required to free ourselves from the pulls of our opinions, preferences and untamed impulses, enabling us to build the philosophical values and virtues. With each instance of resistance, discipline, and will that we practise, there is a Joy. The joy of victory.

The great philosopher of ancient Greece, Plato said, “For a man to conquer himself is the first and noblest of all victories.” ✨

### Reference:

1. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/dehradun/trapped-but-they-too-helped-in-their-own-rescue/articleshow/105573036.cms>